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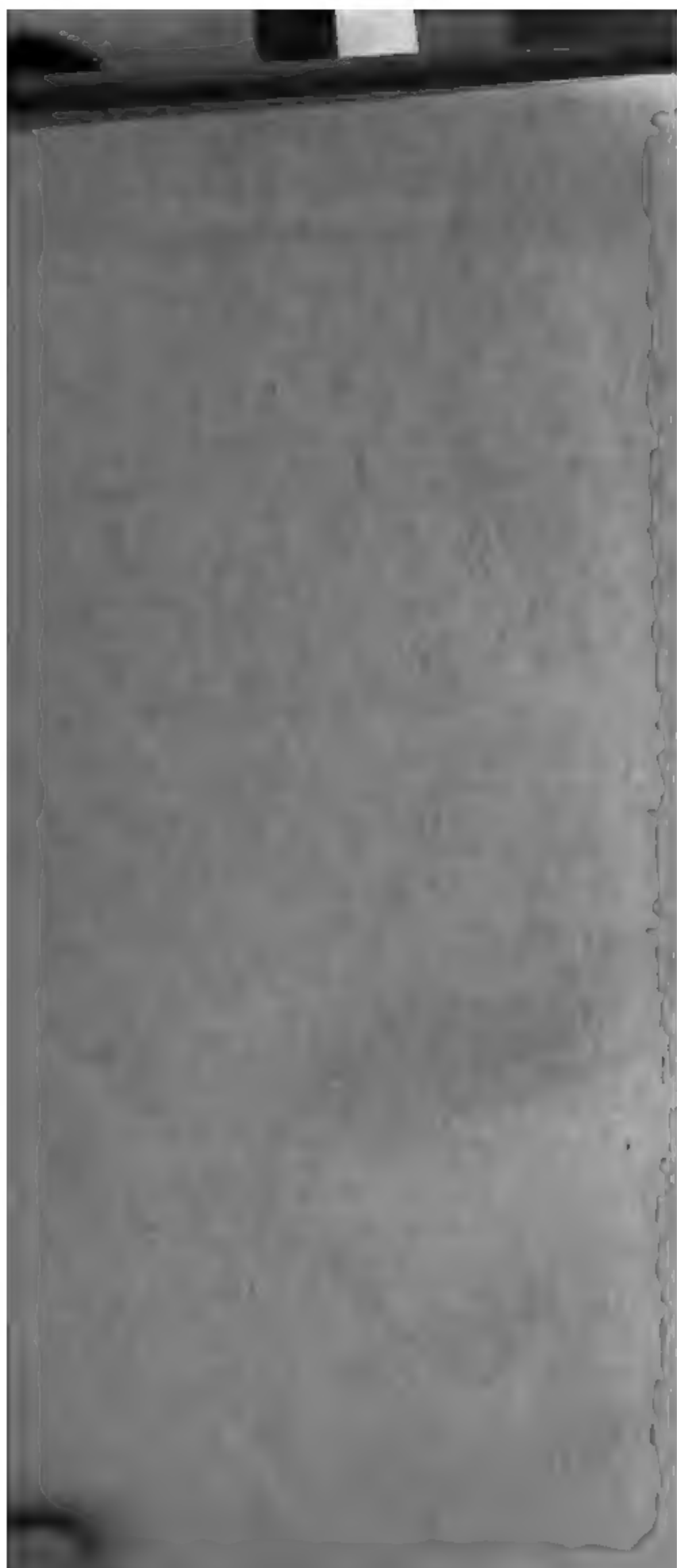
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HERBERT VANLENNERT

DONATED BY THE
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C. F. KEARY

AUTHOR OF

"THE TWO LANCROFTS," "A MARIAGE DE CONVENANCE," ETC.

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HERBERT VANLENNERT.

CHAPTER I.

A PLEASANT September sunshine with no pretence of brilliancy was pouring down upon a stubble-field, across which were trudging two sportsmen each of some twenty-three years of age; and on the left of the line, a keeper. The three proceeded in that silent stolid manner which sport exacts, at any rate in England. Presently a whirr of wings broke on the air, and a small covey of partridges rose into view. Two shots rang out almost simultaneously, a third, and a fourth. At a moment the whole covey flew on as if untouched; the next, one fluttered and sank to the ground. At a word from the keeper, Becky, the retriever bitch, bounded forward. But the bird had dropped close to a bank of furze bushes, the other side of the field upon the left hand, and the outwork of a farm-station which shut off all the view upon that side and descended down the slope of the hill. The other four birds sailed in level flight over the stone wall at the end of the field, seemed for a moment to hang suspended against the pale blue sky, and then sank out of sight behind the wall.

Becky no doubt knew as well as anyone that the wounded bird was lost, and had no serious intention of pricking her nose at the gorse. But she knew or thought she knew that a certain amount of zeal was expected of her; and so, with short suppressed gasps, she began to career up and down before the bank of furze, over a continually wider and wider course. The two young sportsmen, on their side, walked straight on to the opposite gate, followed by the keeper.

"Oh, come back, you brute!" cried one of them, Bertie Vanlennert. "Don't go playing the fool like that."

"This is sickening," said Charles Orcher, his companion, as he leaned his gun against the gate. "We shan't do any more of this. I should think we may as well have lunch now." And

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looked at the watch upon his wrist and hoisted himself up upon the gate. He was a typical young English gentleman, tall, straight, fair, and freckled by the sun. The other was slight and dark, with a keen, eager, not altogether satisfied expression in his eyes.

"All right;" Vanlennert climbed the gate and stretched himself at full length upon the low stone wall. Sometimes he sat up for a moment or two to take a few bites at his sandwich; but he always returned to his horizontal position once more.

The wall was only five feet above the field, but was much higher above the road upon the other side, towards which it displayed a mixture of masonry and native rock. Beyond the road was another wall at a considerably lower level, only high enough to shut off the near parts of a wide valley which stretched below like the trough of a huge wave. Or, if that simile hold good for the valleys in every country called undulating, then we may liken valleys such as this, which are rather characteristic of this corner of Derbyshire, to mighty Atlantic rollers; so even are they, and so stately, one may say, is the sweep of these hills and dales. On this side of the county the fields are bounded more often by stone walls than by hedges. Here and there a fine oak or ash stood solitary in the grass fields. But there was little to interrupt your gaze over the bottom of this terrene wave to where, a mile or so away, another wave began to climb. There was little too to mark the distances; so that to Bertie Vanlennert, for whom the immediate foreground was cut off, the grey buildings straight below him looked more like a toy farm-yard than a real one. A tiny cart stood upon one side of it, and tiny ricks were placed like sentinels along one wall within.

For a man in certain moods there is something especially fascinating in a sight such as this. Life seems for the first time reduced to its just proportions when relegated, in this way, to a place in the middle distance. It was impossible to believe that the miniature Farmer Hillyard, who had just emerged from the house down there with the miniature Swipes at his heels, could be affected by any but the lesser ills of life. He might be revolving in the minute head of him that eternal problem, what would be left over, when he had made up his rent by next quarter-day—even with the reduction of twenty per cent.; or of what use really were to him, with wheat at five-and-thirty shillings a bushel (though that price would be reckoned riches to-day), those ricks of corn which to unsophisticated eyes seemed such

an embodiment of garnered wealth. Questions such as these, though they be matter enough for debate, seem not possibly of supreme importance to anyone whom you behold thus reduced in physical size; and, by a rebound of thought, our own troubles too fall into scale, and what within four walls might seem a heavy misfortune, takes its proper place in the large economy of Nature.

Inarticulate thoughts of this kind were passing through the head of Bertie Vanlennert, and for a time he and his friend ate their lunch in silence. But presently he himself broke the silence without changing his position.

"This is a poor job so far I must say," he said. "The birds ought to come and be shot by the ould family, instead of waiting for the new—who, however, as cockneys, will probably give them a good time."

"H'm, h'm! they've a pretty good one as it is," said his friend from the gate. "You've been shooting abominably to-day, anyhow. Our bag, such as it is, is Higgins's and mine. I suppose you're rather down in the mouth, ain't you, old chap? I don't believe you've made a hit."

"Oh, I don't know. I hit them when they come my way." (Vanlennert's face, which was turned skywards, had in fact assumed a rather gloomy expression.) "Any way, if I miss them now, I hope they'll miss me when I've gone."

"Shan't you stay and see the new *tenants* . . . ?"

"Oh, my dear Charlie, if you knew how sick I am of that damned pun. No, I shan't stay: Uncle George did all the negotiations. I only came of age, you know, when I was twenty-three."

"I didn't know you had regularly come of age."

"What do you mean by 'regularly come of age'? We didn't go in for fireworks and the fatted calf and that sort of thing."

"I imagined that you didn't majorize till twenty-five or something of that sort, and that it was only till then that he wanted to let Netley."

"Oh, *did* you? Nobody *wants* to let Netley, if you come to that. Needs must when the devil drives . . ."

"What a bore!" said the other. "Of course I knew . . ." But not knowing exactly how to finish the sentence, he pulled out his pipe and began filling it. And there was a few minutes' pause.

"By the way," said Bertie. "I forget whether I ever asked you before. Do you know anything about these people?"

You're a kind of man of fashion you know. The glassy fashion and the mouldy form. That's Shakespeare, isn't it?" (And he gave the ghost of a chuckle.)

"Idiot! . . . Well, I know *about* them. You're a sucking barrister, or pretend to be, so I suppose *you* know what the old boy is—Attorney- or Solicitor-General or something, whatever the difference may be."

"Solicitor-General. I know that much. But I mean what is the family like?"

"Well, Lady Tennant is a kind of Thackeray lady of fashion, one of the pushing sort, always trying to shove up, you know. So I've always understood. I believe the daughters are awfully pretty. In fact I know one of them, Mrs. Forster, is . . . I tell you what you've got to do. Swear eternal hatred and vengeance against the whole family. Then, when one of the girls is coming along, get old—that old chap down there, I forget his name—to let out a mad bull at her. You come out of a practicable bush as they say, open an umbrella and drive it off. I know I read a plot like that somewhere. Only you'd better get a circus bull, trained to run round and do no harm."

"But you see as I am going . . ."

"Well, I am, too. I forgot to tell you that, by the bye. I heard this morning. I'm going to cut Alchester and the F. O. for evermore. I'm sent to Rome."

"Oh—Good biz—what are you?"

"A third sec.—what they call attache, you know—unpaid, of course. Why shouldn't you come abroad with me? We could go together to Switzerland or somewhere first. I've got to be in Rome the 1st of November."

"Done. That'll be jolly. It is rather beastly leaving this place, I don't mind owning that."

"Of course it is, old man. It's an awful bore, I must say. My mother told me to see if I could get you to come to them."

"No. Let's go off abroad; that's much better."

"We'll start on Saturday week or thereabouts if that suits you. Well, I've done. I suppose we may as well be moving on now. Becky, you're tired of waiting anyhow, I know. Here's the last sandwich for you, old bitch."

"Where shall we go to now, Higgins?"

"Well, Master Herbert . . ."

"If you call me 'Master Herbert,' I'll dismiss you from Sir William Tennant's service."

Higgins only partially succeeded in grasping the joke.

"Well, sir, suppose you was to try Grantley Gorse. I see a one or two of black game there last month. And nobody's fired a gun there this year."

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Crawford Tennant was asked by Sir Roper Smyth, the Judge of Appeal, why his father, now that he no longer went circuit, had taken a place so far away in the midlands, he replied, that it was because of Mr. Attewoode's precarious state of health.

"Dear me! I didn't know. Is he a near relation?"

"He's not the slightest relation," said Crawford. "But he's member for West Derbyshire."

"Oh, *ah!*" said Sir Roper, and his eyes twinkled. Crawford Tennant was one of his special favourites.

"You know at Bulgeness," the latter went on in his sleepy way, "if they could put off choosing a member till the other constituencies had voted, it would be all right. They have a fancy there for always being represented by someone on the Government side of the house. I don't know why, I'm sure. But it's their hobby: and, like most people, they are prepared to sacrifice a good deal for their hobby. This time they sacrificed my father; and found after all that they had just made a wrong shot. We've been gaining in the counties lately, you know. . . . I say 'we,' I'm sure I don't know why. I suppose one ought to be of the same politics as one's father."

"My mother comes from Derbyshire, too," he added, after a pause. "I rather like the idea of getting away from the home counties myself. I'm going down there at the end of the month. Will you come?"

"Your father asked me down after Christmas. I think I'll wait till then. I thought he wasn't going just yet."

"No more he is. But I shall go down for a week or two, and take some of the Johnnies from the circuit for a little shooting."

"I hope Gertrude won't have gone back before I come."

"Oh, no. She won't go back."

"Not at all? I thought she was devoted to her husband, as people say."

"I dare say. She says she is." (His countenance did not change from its passivity one hair's-breadth.) "Forster's not a bad chap by any means—rather a fool, of course."

"Well, he wasn't a fool when he married Gertrude," said Sir Roper. "My god-daughter has grown uncommonly pretty too. She's not picked up anybody yet, I suppose?"

"I've not heard of anybody in particular. . . . I think this claret is about the best they've got."

"I tell you what," said Sir Roper. "I hear that two of Shuckborough's brothers come up for election next week. Now, what I maintain is, that as this is not a political club, they've no right to put forward men whose only claim is that their brother's in the Cabinet. Shuckborough's all right. He goes too far for me in his politics, though I dare say you don't care about that. I dare say his brothers may be all right, too. But what I mean is, that we don't know anything about them. And if we let in the principle of electing people because . . ."

"Because their brother plays the German flute, exactly, I quite agree."

"No, really it won't do," said Sir Roper, who had begun to grow warmer than suited with his corpulent person and the excellence of his dinner.

As he had proposed, Crawford Tennant came down to Netley Park in the latter days of October with a party of friends. Contrary to Herbert Vanlennert's anticipations, he was an excellent shot. Indeed, he did most things well; too many things well to care to do any one of them for long at a time. By the middle of November he had returned to town, to his practice, whatever that might be. Crawford Tennant was still a bachelor, though his hair was beginning to turn grey. People said he looked as old as his father. But, as a bachelor, to one-half of the polite society of West Derbyshire, he was not the least interesting member of the new household.

At the beginning of December the Tennant family, properly so called, that is to say, Lady Tennant and two of her daughters, Mrs. Forster and Silvia, settled themselves definitely at Netley, and there, at the beginning of the Christmas vacation, they were joined by Sir William. And before Christmas, Bertie Vanlennert was again in Derbyshire, staying with "Uncle George" at Gretton Rectory.

"I don't make much way with Sir William," Uncle George

said, "or with Lady Tennant either, for the matter-a-that, though I used to know her years ago when she was Lucy Reid. But Mrs. Forster is an exceedingly pleasant person; she's just back from India, and——"

"And you're sure to fall in love with Silvia," said Molly Vanlennert.

"Well, if I must I must," her cousin said.

He was of the age when boys say to each other, "For my part, I am not easily pleased," and when the mere vision of a petticoat accelerates to some degree the current of their blood. So that, when a few days after his arrival, the Tennants came to dine at Gretton Rectory, and while Bertie was still dressing for dinner, misty visions flitted through his brain of a fair-skinned golden-haired damsel (so had Silvia been described) who, if he was not precisely to fall in love with her on the spot—indeed, he had no idea in his mind whether he was ever to do this or no—was most certainly in the course of that evening to be supremely charmed by his person and conversation. Wherefore, before he had ever seen Sylvia Tennant, he was half in love with his own anticipation.

"You look nervous, you're going to do it," said Molly, when they were assembled in the drawing-room, the long low drawing-room, pannelled and painted white, with pairs of candles in brass sconces in each of the three uprights down the wall. The room was almost as familiar to Bertie as the drawing-room at Netley. But from that evening onwards it had an especial vividness in his recollection.

"You know I always am nervous before strangers to a certain extent," replied Herbert. "I dare say, the honourable and gallant is too, if the truth were known: only he hides it behind his eyeglass." The "honourable and gallant" was the name given in the family to Lieutenant Gerard Vanlennert, of the Derbyshire Regiment, Molly's brother.

"I can't understand that," said Molly. "I don't think I was, even at your age," she added.

Then the guests began to come in, Captain Banbury, the agent for Lord Banbury's Gretton property, his wife and son came first. Bertie Vanlennert was still struggling with a sleeve-link when Sir William Tennant and his two daughters were announced; Lady Tennant had sent an excuse. The daughters had the indescribable air of *chic* which familiarity with London society gives. Two tall, fair girls. If Gertrude Forster could not properly be called a girl she looked one, at any rate, from a

few yards off, though two years in India had done something to dim a complexion which had once been the most delicate in the world almost.

"My mother is so *very* sorry not to be able to come," she said nominally to Mrs. Vanlennert, but half turning to Bertie. "She particularly wanted to meet you, Mr. Vanlennert. I can't tell you how much she likes Netley, and how grateful we are to you for letting us take such a beautiful place."

"Oh, thank you, yes," Bertie blurted out. This could not be taken as a specimen of the brilliant conversation which he had been imagining an hour before; at the same moment entered the last comers, Mr. and Mrs. Orcher of Roundway Temple.

"How are you, dear Bertie?" said Mrs. Orcher, squeezing Bertie's hand, for he was a great favourite at Roundway. Then dinner was announced.

"I hope you're comfortable at Netley," said Uncle George to Mrs. Forster on his left hand.

"Oh, *most* comfortable: I was just telling Mr. Vanlennert"—she looked across to Herbert—"how grateful we were," etc. . . . "Most delightful," echoed Silvia from her corner, also turning to Bertie, who had taken her in.

"Those old houses are often very inconvenient unless you are used to them," said Mrs. Orcher, with the suspicion of a sniff.

"We don't find Netley so in the least. Is it very old? You have never told me the history of it, do you know?"—this to Uncle George—"but I hope Mr. Vanlennert will come over very soon and do the honours of the ghosts if there are any."

"Oh, no, Netley's not old at all," said Herbert. "The only really old house about here is Roundway Temple."

"My dear Bertie! How can you say so?" exclaimed Mrs. Orcher.—"That's quite a mistake, Mrs. Forster. Our house is really quite new, except the cellars."

"Well, I meant the cellars," Bertie replied. "And the left wing—you know that's old too. What I meant was, it's an historical sort of place."

"Our house is called Roundway Temple," explained Mr. Orcher to Gertrude, "because it was once, that is, a part of it was once, a house of the Knights Templars."

"Who were the Templars?" said the lieutenant to Mrs. Forster. "Do you know exactly? As people used to say to me, you were at school later than I was."

"Well, Silvia was at school later still," said Gertrude, looking towards her sister.

"Yes, I think I know," said Silvia in answer to Gerard Vanlennert's eyeglass. She had attended M. Roche's classes and took life seriously.

"The Good Templars," put in Bertie, who did not. "Oh, everybody has heard of them!"

Silvia began to feel angry with her next neighbour, whom she had been ready to make something of a hero of, but who turned out to be such a mere boy. She had come prepared to take an interest in Mr. Vanlennert, the dispossessed heir—only temporarily dispossessed, no doubt; but still there was something romantic in an heir to an estate even in temporary difficulties. He did not look so unlike an Edgar of Ravenswood, rather undersized and of rather a plain type. But his behaviour was very different. She did not know whether he was really ignorant or whether he meant that for a joke.

"If it is a joke it's a very silly one," she thought. Then she began in a polite, indifferent way to ask questions upon matters in which he might be expected to take an interest, Netley, the village, hunting, what university he had been at, getting rather lame and stammering replies.

For Bertie Vanlennert on his side the whole room which he knew so well had become changed. It was as if he had never seen it before. General Vanlennert, whose portrait (the replica of the one at Netley) stared down on him from the opposite wall, was half alive. The buzz of conversation all round the room fell upon his ears like the sound of a rising storm, full of portentous meaning which he could not decipher and yet must. Above all, the companion beside him was a miraculous being charged with unknown influences, too strong for him to try to analyse. The touch of her dress could not have been more magical if, instead of being a commonplace Indian muslin, it had been an electric dress emitting sparks, nor the flash of her diamond bangle as she raised her hand to the lace about her throat (an habitual action of Silvia Tennant's) been more dazzling had she been armed with the "terrible fringed ægis" which Athene bore upon the plains of Troy.

He did not know afterwards how he could have looked and talked as usual, nor whether he had done so. A miracle had indeed taken place in his moral being. But it is one which takes place every day, and is called "falling in love."

When you are struck a sudden blow by a stone, say, thrown you know not whence, for one minute fraction of time you forget all your past; the world begins again for you; the hedges,

the grass at your feet, are for that short moment unknown objects which have to be learnt afresh. This in its way is a miracle of the intellect, only that you forget it as soon as it has passed. Falling in love, likewise, often seems afterwards and upon reflection a commonplace action enough. But in its essence it is, even more than the effect of the physical shock, a thing supernatural, passing all bounds of experience or of foresight; miraculous in itself, independently of its consequences or of its duration. Probably this too, like the physical blow, is an instantaneous shock. It is only in the retrospect that we think we can trace the slow preparation for it. . . .

For some time past the talk has split itself up into fragments. But now Molly attracted general attention, speaking across the table to Mrs. Orcher—

“Bertie has been distinguishing himself since he was here last by rescuing beautiful damsels from the jaws of death,” she said.

“Ah, yes,” said Mrs. Orcher. (Her conscience pricked her a little that she had become so friendly with Mrs. Forster during the past five minutes.) “I heard something about your having an adventure in Switzerland, Bertie. Do tell me all about it.”

“Yes, do tell us,” said Silvia in her softest tones.

“It wasn’t a beautiful maiden; at least I mean,” he said, “she was only a little girl about fourteen or fifteen.”

“But how did it happen?”

“It was the most curious thing possible, the accident, that is to say. Because we were simply walking through a wood and it was perfectly plain sailing.”

“Where was that?” said Mrs. Banbury.

“At Ober Schellingen. I met these people by chance. Charlie and I went over the Gries Pass, you know,” he said to Mrs. Orcher: “he went on to Domo d’Osola, and I went back to Airolo and over the St. Gothard; and as I say, I came across these people at Ober Schellingen. It was rather late in the season, you know, for a place like that. His name is Maynard. He’s an artist.”

“Oh, Maynard!” said Mrs. Forster and Silvia, looking across to each other.

“Yes,” said Bertie. “Do you know him?”

“By reputation, oh, yes,” said Silvia.

“What does he paint?”

“Well, I think landscapes—doesn’t he?” (to her sister.)

“No, figures. Well, landscapes and figures,” said Gertrude

rather doubtfully. "I can't quite recall any of his pictures last year. Oh, yes! 'The Cider Makers;' don't you remember? Rather a large—— But I beg your pardon, Mr. Vanlennert; please go on and tell us about your adventure."

"There was no adventure. He isn't half a bad chap, any way, whatever he paints. Well, we were walking through a wood; he was first, this girl next, and I was last. Suddenly her foot slipped, and before you could say Jack Robinson she had shot down a little slope and went over the edge. I suppose the fir-needles had made her boots slippery."

"What edge?" said Molly.

"Well, there was a stream below, running down the valley; and this wood was on the hill-side. It *was* a precipice, no doubt, which she rolled over—forty or fifty feet down to the stones in the river-bed; enough to do for you, I dare say. When I got to the edge she had really gone over, and was hanging to a root with one hand. It was rather a touch-and-go thing."

"How dreadful!" said Mrs. Orcher. "What *did* you do? Wasn't her father frightened to death?"

"She went over so quickly that she hadn't time even to cry out. It was my 'hollo!' which made him turn round. I had to run down the slope. Well, then, of course, I went down flat and caught hold of her. He held my legs. I gradually worked down till I could get a tight grip. She put her arms round my neck."

"That was nice," said Gerard Vanlennert.

"I told her to," said Bertie, with one of his quick smiles.

"It was a pity, perhaps, she wasn't older," said Mrs. Forster.

"I was rather glad myself. If she hadn't been so light she might have pulled me over after her. Her father was in such a funk—fright, that he didn't half hold on to my feet."

"Was she hurt?" said Silvia.

"Yes. She'd scratched her arm rather, and her ankle was badly sprained or worse, a tendon broken or something. She wasn't well when I said good-bye."

"Was that soon after the accident?" said Molly.

"A week," he replied, looking a little self-conscious in spite of himself.

"He *is* a boy," said Silvia to herself once more.

"What do you think of him?" said Gertrude Forster to her

sister opposite, as Sir William slumbered in his corner of the carriage on their way home.

"Oh, I like him," said Silvia; and Gertrude was glad that she had not replied "Who? Mr. Vanlennert?"

For her own part, Gertrude had made identically the same reflection about him which had twice crossed the mind of Silvia, that he was a mere boy. Gertrude had very different views for her sister.

CHAPTER III.

Two days later there was a meet at Netley Park. It was the week before Christmas. At that midwinter season the time of the meet was 11.15. But as Gretton Rectory was only two miles from Netley, there was no sort of hurry for the gentlemen of the Gretton party. Nevertheless Bertie was down half an hour before his usual time, and found nobody at the breakfast-table but Molly, sorting out the letters and getting the books ready for prayers.

"You *are* early," she said, looking him full in the face.

"No, I don't think I am; it's nearly nine o'clock," he answered, walking to the window.

"I heard you knocking up the unfortunate Gerard half an hour ago."

"Gerard's nearly always late. Ain't you coming?" he added, suddenly, remarking that Molly had no habit on.

"No—poor Chester is no use now; I shall have to give up hunting now, I expect. I've nobody to ride with me now, you see, except when Gerard's here."

"Do you mean that you've not been out this winter?"

"Not till Gerard came down. Then I rode Stampede once or twice. I hope you don't mind. You see he wanted exercising."

"Mind! Of course not. I'll tell you what, you're going to ride Stampede this morning."

"Nonsense, Bertie; of course I shall do nothing of the sort."

"You are, though. I swear I won't mount him this morning; so you may do just as you like."

"No, dear Bertie; don't be foolish. Nothing will induce me to hunt this morning, I tell you that. And you'll only disappoint Gerard. No man likes to have a woman in tow, as you

would say; you know that perfectly well. I know he was particularly looking forward to to-day. Good-morning, father. Shall I ring for the servants?"

"How confoundedly late Gerard is!" said Bertie, directly he got upon his feet again. He didn't make any further allusion to the oath he had sworn a few minutes before, but went out to look after his mount.

At ten o'clock Lieutenant Vanlennert put in an appearance.

"How beastly late you are!" said his cousin, who was just beginning to tackle his first boot.

"What the deuce is the hurry? We needn't start till eleven."

"Oh, yes, we must," said Herbert. "I hate being late."

"But we shan't be late, bless your soul! I could almost walk there in a quarter of an hour."

"Yes; but I want to be there before the time, if possible. I—I've not seen anybody yet; I like to have a talk with people and that sort of thing." And it was possibly his exertions with his top-boot that turned his sallow face red.

"Bertie likes to have a talk with people and that sort of thing," said Molly, with an intonation whose meaning it was difficult to catch. But as the owner of Netley had not hitherto been remarkable for his sociability, it was probably not one of mere assent.

"Well, it's all very well for you, being here always," said Bertie, reddening this time with anger. "But when you've been away you naturally want to see people."

"But you'll see nobody, bless you! but Tom and Evans and the hounds," said Gerard. "You won't even see old Bailey. He never turns up till five minutes before the master does."

Nevertheless, as a result of Bertie's fidgetting, they were mounted a good five minutes before eleven. Bertie was in pink. He always wore it in his grandfather's time, who considered that (as everything else) not a question of keenness in sport, but solely of a person's position in the county. Gerard Vanlennert was in melton.

The only outcome of their punctuality was that at Gretton cross-ways they overtook the hounds, trotting leisurely forward under the charge of Tom and Evans, the whips.

"What sort of sport have you had this winter?" said Bertie.

"Not over and above good, sir. And you see Master 'Arry

being gone to India, it don't seem like the same thing it was last year. And Bailey, you know, sir, 'e don't grow younger. You've been in foreign parts, too, sir, by what I 'ear," Evans added, rather hastily, as if to cover the audacity of the last insinuation.

"Yes," said Bertie, but a little absently; for they had come in sight of the park-gates and his thoughts had flown beyond them. So that Evans' conversational powers died within him. "'E's a queer 'un," he said to himself, eying Bertie askance. "Boxer, come out of that," and he turned round to send his long lash after an unsuspecting hound who was sniffing into a rabbit-hole in the bank.

Gerard on his side was deep in a conversation on horse-flesh with Tom Harding, the first whip.

There had been a slight frost in the night. Slow large drops of melting rime dripped heavily upon them as they rode up the avenue, or pattered on the moist leaves below. The tread of their horses sounded dully. At last they reached the front door. A groom, who was standing near, threw himself forward to take Master Herbert's and Master Gerard's horses; and Sir William came to the door to ask them into the house. He was a very handsome man, with wonderfully fresh colouring for his age. It was from him that his daughters got their beauty; their refinement they got from their mother.

"Will you come in, Mr. Vanlennert? I think my daughters are just getting ready to go out;" and at that moment a small park-phaeton and pair were driven up to the door.

"Oh, they're not going to ride!" said Bertie in some dismay. He had been picturing to himself all the morning how lovely Silvia would look on horseback; and imagining a hundred opportunities—of gates to be opened, leads to be given—which might bring him into her neighbourhood during the day. But at that moment Silvia appeared.

She greeted Bertie quite as an old friend, his cousin with a shade more of formality. The former was "in face" that morning. His slight, well-made figure was better suited to the compactness of a hunting coat and breeches than to the loose dress which is the ordinary country costume of Englishmen; while the scarlet coat and white necktie gave a certain picturesque distinction to his dark, eager face, to which suppressed excitement had imparted a needful touch of colour and added fresh brilliancy to his bright eyes. Silvia, all in brown, her golden hair drawn up under the furry trimming of her hat, her white

throat rising above the edging of her jacket, seemed if possible more divine than she had done in evening dress. As you looked at her you could swear that brown trimmed with bear-skin was absolutely the most perfect dress for beauty of her order. But when Gertrude appeared, as she did in a few minutes, in grey of precisely similar make, allegiance became divided between the two.

One or two other men came into the house now. This was the first meet at Netley for the season. For Netley stood rather upon the edge of the available country of the Stretton Hunt. On one side of the estate the grass-fields grew steeper and more stony, as they led up to a patch of moorland known upon this side of it as Grantley Gorse. To the west, Grantley Gorse broke away absolutely into fine crags of limestone, and underneath their shade stretched a wood of handsome beech and oak. Then came a clearing in the wood, which constituted Netley Park. The red-brick Netley House, backed against the wood and the limestone rocks, was visible from a good distance; for it looked down a long stretch of valley winding in a slow curve from south to west. It was the same valley over which Bertie Vanlennert and Charlie Orcher had gazed one morning in September a week before the former left Netley. On its eastern side Grantley Gorse sloped down to meet a much more practicable country, and it was towards this second valley across Hatherley Common, which formed the upper part of it, that the fox was expected to break, means being taken if necessary to induce him not to disappoint expectation.

Sir Tatton Brydges, the master, had his strictly preordained methods of procedure in all that concerned the Stretton Hunt; and these were quite independent of social considerations. But for several members of the hunt, it was rather inconvenient that the first meet of the season at Netley should have fallen so soon after the advent of the new-comers, on whom many of them had not yet called. Consequently only a certain number came into the house; but of these Sir Tatton was one.

"How do you do, Sir William?" he said. "I had the pleasure of knowing Lady Tennant many years ago." He bowed elaborately to the two daughters of the house but did not speak to them. "Ah, Vanlennert, I'm glad to see you down here again. Well, I should think we'd better be going on now. What do you think, eh? Have you heard whether you've got many foxes this year?"

"I've not got any foxes," said Bertie in a low voice.

"To be sure! No, not exactly. Well, Grantley Gorse is a pretty safe find. I should think we might as well be going now, eh?" and he walked out in his stiff way and was helped on to his horse.

The pack was grouped under the trees of the avenue, some little way from the house; and the bright bodies of the hounds and the incessant flick of their tails seemed almost to flash from beneath the woody shadow. Under these trees, too, a large portion of the field were riding at a foot's pace, up and down, crossing and recrossing in that fashion resembling the figures of an elaborate dance which is incident to the endeavour to maintain a conversation when your horses are too fidgetty to stand still for more than half a minute. Now and again the quadrupeds gave vent to their feelings by loud neighs and by violent shakings like those of a man in the grip of an ague. Bertie lingered near Gertrude and Silvia till they got into their pony-carriage. His bright bay, which had been kept too long waiting, gave a plunge or two when he mounted; then he trotted off to join the field under the trees; then Bailey, the huntsman, came from behind the house, the whips cracked their whips, and the hunt moved off.

A meet was no new sight to Silvia. But side by side with this meet in the midlands those she was accustomed to at Ad-dingbourne, where the smartest members of the hunt were city men off duty for the day, showed like a stage scene by the side of real life. When the procession moved out of the park, Bertie, who had found many acquaintances to whom he was obliged to be civil, had the helpless consciousness that the pony-carriage was far to the rear of him. Gradually the growing excitement of the occasion began to gain upon him. His new-fledged passion seemed under this influence to become something ideal and romantic beyond the reach of ordinary things. But presently it grew less distinct and more dreamlike, till, finally, instead of seeing Silvia's eyes and hair constantly before him bathed in a hallowed light, all his senses were alive to the surroundings of horses and hounds and to the expectation of the sharp yelping cry which would show that the fox had been found. Nevertheless, when the field turned into the long croft, he waited till Gertrude and Silvia drove up.

"There's a grass lane which takes you to Hatherley Bottom. He's sure to break in that direction, almost. James will tell you where to go," and he trotted off wholly absorbed in the coming sport.

Long croft led over the brow of the hill. Bertie trotting briskly forward reached the gate of the croft just as the hounds were being put into the gorse bushes on the other side. Before him stretched another wide valley not dissimilar from the one he had just left, save that it did not preserve its wave-like features so long; but about a mile to the right the farther hill disappeared and the valley unfolded into a faintly undulating plain. The horizon was cut off by fresh ranges of hills. A small brook debouched from the other side of the gorse about half a mile from where he was standing, descended the valley and emptied itself into a larger stream, which flowed sluggishly through the plain. The brook was upon this side the boundary of the Netley property. A light southeast wind was blowing, and struck him straight in the face, now that he had passed the brow of the hill and turned to look down the valley; and his bay, Stampede, who had not been ridden much of late, began to plunge with eagerness for the sport to begin.

Old Simmons, the earth-stopper, who had been holding open the gate till Bertie passed through, joined a group of pedestrians, in which he made a conspicuous figure in his faded pink. They all stood near the wall and discussed the chances of the day in low tones, as if pedestrians might only by sufferance take any interest therein.

"There's plenty in there, that's all *I* know," said Simmons, with a look in which knowingness rose to the verge of cunning.

"What's old Bailey a-'ollerin' at? *They're* right enough," said another.

"The markis isn't 'ere to-day, is 'e? I don't see 'im," said a third.

"Yes; that's 'im talking to the master."

"No, it ain't. You'n got no eyes. That's young Mr. Atte-woode."

"Well, Willyum, your young master's 'ere again I see."

"He's 'ere, and he ain't 'ere," said William.

"'A do begin to favour th' old squire wonderful."

"What's they like these new folks at the Park? Farmer 'Illyard's Tom 'a don't speak very well of the young gentleman."

"No; nor I don't like 'im, neither," said William. "But he ain't 'ere now. The ladies is well enough."

Stampede, who had fidgetted, sidled, stamped, and plunged, now took the matter into his own hands and trotted off with that short elastic step which race-horses have when they are

brought up to the post, and which, perhaps, is the most delightful motion in the world.

"I expect this will be about our last day at present," said Captain Banbury, jogging up to Bertie's side. "There was a slight frost last night and the wind's backed round to the east. Ah, they've found at all events," he said.

For a sharp solitary cry followed by another and another arose from the gorse bushes. Stampede became more excited than ever: Captain Banbury and Bertie trotted off towards the steep slope which formed the head of the valley.

But the cry, which at one moment seemed unanimous, now scattered again over all parts of the gorse; the whips, in great excitement, rode in and out, cracking their whips and holloing to the stragglers of the pack. At last the voices rose once more in chorus; the welcome sound "gone-away, gone-away, gone-away, gone-away," was lifted on the keen air; Stampede set off at a gallop, without waiting for any orders: Bertie's hopes and fears, Silvia and Netley, were all forgotten: nothing remained in his consciousness but the sound of other horses' hoofs beating the ground beside, behind, in front of him; the whistle of the wind in his ears, the breathing, moving object beneath him, the sensation of touching which seemed to send through him a thrill sweet as a caress. With an effort he suppressed the temptation to sink into a sort of ecstatic dream, for a fence was drawing nearer and nearer.

"Who is that who took it then?" he said to himself. "Why, of course, it's Attewoode. I know him well enough," and he gently restrained the too enthusiastic Stampede. "Ah, that's Gerard; my turn will come next." Then, as he let Stampede go, and as the horse's head rose near his own, he felt a half desire to throw his arms round its neck, not from the motives which influenced Johnny Gilpin, but from mere excess of delight and sympathy. . . .

"I shall pass Gerard over this field that's certain. . . . Where shall I take the next hedge? What does it matter, as it's such a low one? . . . Ah, by Jove, the next's a stone wall. I should like to try that. . . . But it would be folly with the gate open. How jolly the hounds look going over the wall! . . . It's a check, though," and he had to relapse once more into a trot to let such of the field as were in front of him pass through the gate. "After all, Tom Harding and Attewoode have taken the wall," he said, as he looked on; "I wish I had done it."

The hounds had spread into a white line which stretched across the next field, and seemed to disappear upon the farther side. The fact was that here the field fell down abruptly to a muddy ditch which the fox had crossed, and then had turned and run alongside the ditch, crossing the muddy water twice, and finally made off towards the hills to the left. Half the pack, crossing the ditch and rushing forward, reached the middle of the following field, and then realised that they had lost the scent. Then they scattered on all sides utterly at fault. In a moment all was in confusion. A good part of the hunt had followed the erring hounds, Evans, one of the whips, among the number. On a mound to the left, a pedestrian, who had seen the fox, made frantic gestures, though his voice was almost lost. Bailey and Sir Tatton rode in that direction, where now some of the cleverer hounds who had never lost the scent appeared in view. But meantime the fox, who had really been turned by the pedestrian on the mound, had run westward again, and in consequence some of the hounds who had swarmed across the former field got upon his scent once more and began to cry in their turn. Evans rode forward to drive them off, thinking they were upon the scent of a hare; and thus, as sometimes happens in a battle, for no apparent reason the day which had opened brilliantly seemed lost. Bailey grew red in the face with holloing and gesticulating to Evans: the master blew his horn. Fortunately the leaders of the pack had never lost the scent: and now the fortune of the day turned once more. Only that all things were reversed: those who had been first were last in the field, and the last were first.

Meantime Gertrude and Silvia had, as directed, taken the green lane which bounded the hill and debouched upon Hatherley Bottom. Unluckily, before they reached the end the run had begun: and they attained a point of vantage in time to see the field disappear one after another over the edge of the next rise and into the valley below. One or two farmers' sons on rough colts, who had come more to see the run than to follow, galloped past; and this and the fresh breeze which blew across the common set the ponies pulling as hard as they could.

"Where shall we go to, James?" said Gertrude, red and out of breath with the exertion of holding the ponies in.

"To the left, mum," said James, touching his hat. "But I'm afraid we shan't see much more of 'un."

They turned and drove along by a spur of the common,

the ponies trotting as hard as they could go and now and again breaking into a canter which it taxed all Gertrude's strength to keep in check. And the same breeze which had begun by exciting Herbert to the summit of hope and romance, and ended by driving even Silvia out of his head, now stirred her calmer blood and set her, too, weaving romantic dreams.

Not but that Silvia was at all times given to romantic dreaming. She was not talkative: she lived in thought a little apart from the rest of her family. And in the world which she entered alone there was always in the front or in the background a Knight of the Swan, mediævally pious, chivalrous, devoted, ideally beautiful and brave. He was so vague a dream that Silvia had scarcely endowed him with any definite features. His personality was expressed to her mind by strains of music; if by words at all, by the language of modern ballads—"star-like eyes," rhyming to "sighs;" "stately brow," rhyming to "voice so tender and low."

None of the young men whom she had been in the habit of meeting, alert young stock-brokers and barristers—though they danced to perfection—heavy dragoons or rising young politicals, answered to this vague ideal.

It cannot be said that Bertie Vanlennert came near fulfilling it either. But at any rate he was a type differing from all those to which she was accustomed. He certainly had looked exceedingly well, not exactly handsome but attractive, this morning, when he mounted Stampede, who reared and plunged before the front door. For a little while Silvia's thoughts strayed from the Knight of the Swan to contemplate this picture. And for the same time, the first perhaps of her life, she gained a notion of a possible kind of love-making in which she should not play quite such a quiescent part as she had always dreamed; wherein beside distant mutual adoration there might be room for such things as mutual companionship, mutual help. She said nothing of this to herself. But the vision of Bertie Vanlennert on Stampede remained before her mind's eye not unpleasantly, with his keen, dark, sensitive face, which had even in it tragic possibilities. The thought of this dispossessed young land-owner had something romantic about it.

"Poor boy," she said to herself. The last word, however, made her realise how different he was from the Knight of the Swan, the being of unapproachable majesty and goodness, and she turned with a slight feeling of vexation to dismiss him from her thoughts.

"Let me drive now," she said. "You look as if your arms were nearly pulled off." James got down to open a gate.

"All right. Here, James, hold them a minute;" and they changed places.

"Right or left?" said Silvia.

"Right, miss." And they started off again. The hunt had disappeared long ago, and the banks and hedge of the lane down which they drove soon took away all chance of their getting a further view. The ponies were going more quietly. But suddenly, almost without a sound, a white object slipped through a gap in the hedge in front of them, jumped into the lane, and, without looking round, immediately mounted the opposite bank and disappeared; then another and another, until the whole pack had passed. Tom Harding jumped the hedge ten yards in front of the ponies, rode a little way down the lane and scrambled up just within sight. Captain Banbury followed, then Attewoode. The ponies began again to pull furiously; and Silvia, though she was stronger than her sister, was not so good a whip. She gave too hard a jerk; the ponies plunged in the air. Some more followers of the hunt thundered along on the other side of the hedge; but they were making for a gate farther down the field. Then a solitary horseman jumped into the lane. It was Bertie Vanlennert. He was alone for a moment, and, bent solely on finding a place to mount the opposite bank, his eyes wandered up and down the lane. It was a minute before he recognized Gertrude and Silvia, or they him: for the ponies now were rearing and backing so that the carriage was in some danger of being turned into the ditch. A rustic who had come running down the lane stood by open-mouthed.

"Give 'un a touch with the whip, miss," said James.

"You had better get out, I think," said Silvia, rather frightened.

Bertie jumped from his horse and gave it to the farm lad. Then he went to the ponies' heads; and only now did he awake to the full consciousness of his former self.

"How extraordinary," he thought, "that I should have been speculating a moment ago whether I could manage not to notice they were in a fix and follow the hunt! What are five hundred hunts compared to the pleasure of doing Miss Tennant a service?" And instead of assuming that the animals were all right the moment they stopped backing, he continued to pet and quiet them.

"I almost think James had better drive now," said Silvia.

"But don't let us keep you, pray, Mr. Vanlennert," said Gertrude.

"They'll be all right now, miss," said James, reassuringly, going to take their heads. For like everybody else he thought that Bertie's one object must be to get away.

"If you'd like to change with James, I'll hold them," said Bertie.

"Well, I should think it would be best," said Silvia, looking at her sister.

"No; but it's a dreadful pity, Mr. Vanlennert, you're losing everything," said Gertrude.

When James had taken the reins, Bertie for form's sake mounted again and rode down the lane. But he returned in five minutes.

"I don't see them anywhere. I expect they've gone to Branton. They're pretty sure to run back this way and draw Andersby's covert." He took care not to look at James as he said this. "I think I'll stop and have my lunch here if you don't object;" and he opened his saddle pocket.

"Then you must have some of our lunch. That's the only thing we can do. We've got some plum-pudding and I am sure you've got nothing so good as that."

The farm lad held Vanlennert's horse, James stood at the head of the ponies, and Bertie seated himself on one of the carriage steps. His shyness led him to take Gertrude's side; but he looked at Silvia while he ate his lunch and they talked.

It was an ideal scene for a meeting of lovers. The bank and hedge kept off the east wind; and the sun which had now crossed the zenith began to throw his rays upon their side, the eastern side of the lane. From minute to minute a leaf of dock or bramble, which had still kept a thin covering of rime, changed it into pearly dew, which made its ruddy tint grow ruddier. Then the crystal drops ran together and dripped with a tiny rustle on to the ground beneath. Bertie's horse was being led up and down the lane, and his feet crushed farther or nearer on the moist earth. Once some rooks passed over their heads cawing mournfully.

"Now," said Gertrude presently, "you might tell us about the ghosts, Mr. Vanlennert."

"Oh, no," said Silvia; "not in the middle of the day."

Bertie had just begun upon a piece of plum-pudding. He ate very heartily for an Edgar of Ravenswood.

"With plum-pudding I should think they would come in all right," he said, smiling to Silvia. "Only, unluckily, I've got none. I suppose they were left out by accident when we took Netley."

"Who was there before you?" Gertrude asked; she thought she had heard the Vanlennerts had been at Netley for a couple of centuries. Silvia's face fell a little.

"The Duke of Wharton. It was one of his places. He had several, I fancy," Bertie replied.

"The Duke of *Wharton*? I didn't know there was such a title?" Gertrude said.

"Oh, not *now*. It is the man that Macaulay talks about, don't you remember?—in James the Second's reign. . . ."

"Oh, yes, I think I do remember," Gertrude answered. (It is an expression which may be translated, "I am sure I do not.")

"Did you come here with William the Third?" said Silvia, who knew more of history.

"I don't know about *with* him. The old fellow who bought Netley was a merchant or something in Amsterdam."

"Is that his portrait that looks like a Rembrandt?" Gertrude said. (The likeness consisted in the fact that the subject of it wore dark clothes and a ruff.)

"Yes. No. The one you mean is his father. . . . We were French originally, I believe." But Bertie volunteered no further facts about the family history. It was only at a later time that Silvia learnt the most interesting parts of it. How a certain Charles, Vicomte St. Léonard, younger brother of the Comte de Rennes, had in the reign of Charles the Ninth of France embraced "The Religion," and been disowned by the head of the house, a bigoted Catholic. How in the late summer of a very celebrated year, 1572, the Count had made overtures for a reconciliation, and invited his brother Charles to pay him a visit in his hotel on the Ile St. Louis. But as Vicomte Charles fell ill, he was prevented from accepting the invitation, and thus was prevented from being in the French capital on the twenty-fourth of August, or, in other words, on the day of Saint Bartholomew in this year 1572. After that day there was no further talk of a reconciliation between the two brothers. A second Vicomte Charles, son of the first, fought by his father's side while he was yet a boy. But when

Henry the Fourth bought Paris by a mass, the father and son, both irreconcilables, the former a very old man, left France and settled in Holland. The third in succession spent the remains of his patrimony and married the daughter of old Hoogstretten, the Amsterdam merchant. After that the family dropped the French title and took the Dutch name of Van Lenard, Vanlennaert, under which style they settled in England towards the end of William the Third's reign.

Bertie did not tell this, but he did speak a little about his grandfather and what he thought of him when he was first brought to Netley by his father. He had very little memory of this father except in connection with that event, for he had died when Bertie was only four years old. Bertie knew that his father had not been considered a credit to the family; and he had as a matter of fact heard very little about him. The Tennants themselves knew enough not to make enquiries on this head.

When the young squire began to talk in a more general way of the beauties of West Derbyshire his eyes softened, and he might very well have stood for a portrait of Scott's Edgar. Even Gertrude recognised this, and wished on the whole that this *contretemps* had never taken place.

"Do you think there is a chance of our seeing any more of the hunt?" she said, giving a slight shiver.

Bertie started. He had forgotten what had brought him there. "Well, I—hardly think—know—What do you think, James?" he said, not liking to speak against his conscience.

"I can't say, sir, I'm sure," said James, rather grimly. He, like all the servants at Netley, considered the squire was much too kind to these interlopers. "You *might* come across them if you was to go by Andersby's farm." And Bertie was fain to remount and go on this quest.

"I'm tired of this," Gertrude said as soon as he had disappeared. "I vote we go back."

"What did become of you?" said Gerard to his cousin later on that afternoon. "You got thrown out, didn't you? How did you manage that?"

"Well, I shouldn't have been, only I happened to come across the Tennants, and they had got into a fix. Their ponies were backing into a ditch, and I had to go to their head."

"How dreadfully unfortunate!" said Molly. "But hadn't they got James with them? He ought to be able to manage a

couple of ponies." To which remark Bertie vouchsafed no reply.

"It is all the worse because it's freezing now, and I expect we are in for a regular frost," said Gerard Vanlennert; and then, pointedly in the direction of Molly, "it reconciles me to having to go away to-morrow."

"Thanks; that's very pretty of you," she replied.

"Oh, are you on duty again?" said Bertie.

"Yes, on *duty*," said Molly; at which the lieutenant blushed slightly and twisted his moustache.

CHAPTER IV.

IN the middle of the lawn opposite Bertie's bedroom window at Gretton stood a high arbor-vitæ. It was always the first thing which his eyes lighted upon when he looked out. This morning it was a miracle of white filigree. And looking down, he saw that the green of the lawn was all overlaid with silver. In the clear frosty air he heard the voices of some children out of sight behind the garden barrier of thick rhododendrons and bare young beeches, of quickset hedge and of paling outside of that; for the rectory garden was well sheltered from the eyes of the profane. At that corner a path which led through some fields to the village school neared the paling, and along the path no doubt the boys and girls were passing. Their day was already well begun. Bertie felt a momentary shame at the thought of this, and again at hearing voices and sounds of labour from the back-yard on the right. Thoughts about the toiling world had never even approached him at Netley, nor yet at Cambridge. But here in Gretton Rectory he was nearer to the world of men.

All that he said was "Confound my luck!" as he looked upon the white grass. "It begins to freeze directly I get home. And even when there is a day's hunting . . ." He could not help a moment of regret. But almost immediately intervened a delicious memory of the wonderful lunch of yesterday, which now seemed a thing almost too transcendental to be a fact, of Silvia's beautiful fair face rising above its brown fur setting. That fresh batch of girls whom he could hear singing beyond the bushes, singing a carol or something, were an apt

accompaniment to the vision. Were they not votaries approaching the shrine of the goddess—*his* goddess? Yes, there was no use blinking the fact. This new delicious feeling, this wondrous glow never felt before could mean nothing else. He was, he was in love.

"Oh wonderful, oh, incomparable world! Oh, frost and snow! Oh, sounds of labour in the morning air! Oh, voices of young girls clear as tinkling brooks, for what were ye made but to sing the praises of love, who out of darkness calls for the light?" thus sang his blood.

Three days later the Rectory party went to dine at Netley. When the last run had been duly discussed, the subject of skating came on the *tapis*. The servants were sent out to make enquiries, and it was discovered that the Netley ponds would bear; and Bertie and Molly were invited to come over next morning with their skates.

As Bertie and his cousin were setting out they met Mr. Wheatley, the agent of the Netley property.

"I was just coming to have a talk with your uncle," he said to Herbert in a tone which invited him to be of the conference.

"Oh, all right: he's in his study I believe," replied the young squire, not taking the hint.

Wheatley and Uncle George spent an hour in close conference in the study at Gretton. When the former had gone, Mrs. Vanlennert came into the room. She found her husband standing before his sloping desk and bookcase, the one that stood between the two windows. Above in the glazed shelves it contained theological books in handsome bindings; in the drawers below it held a wonderful assortment of packets of seeds and bulbs, of fly-books, manuscripts, odds and ends. At this moment the rector was sorting a parcel of bulbs which had just arrived from Sugden's; an operation in which he had been interrupted by the arrival of the agent. He did not look up when his wife came into the room, but he began at once upon the subject in hand.

"Well, my dear, Wheatley's just been here. He's been talking to me about the Glebe Farm. He says that Fladwell's just ruining the land and we must get rid of him. It's very awkward; I'm sure I don't know what to do about it. (Two—four—six—eight—ten. I thought there were only ten: I must make a note of that. . . .) No, I don't," he said, as he

returned his note-book into his pocket. Then he straightened himself to his full height and meditatively felt the bridge of his nose. "But after all," he went on briskly and almost with an air of cheerfulness, "that's comparatively a small matter compared with Netley. That's what he was talking about most of the time. I am afraid things look very bad there, very bad indeed;" and as he said this Uncle George turned his back upon the desk and looked his wife full in the face. "If there was any detached portion we could get a price for and pay off some of the charges in that way. But it's impossible to get a price for anything now-a-days, absolutely impossible. There was that farm of Hinks's over by Burton Broadway. Hinks has been threatening to leave; and Wheatley thought that if we could sell that or some part of it for labourers' cottages that would be a help. But now he tells me that two of the fires at Burton are blown out; so there's an end of that chance at present, at any rate. It's most unfortunate I'm bound to say, *most* unfortunate." And with that last expression he seemed to breathe a sigh of relief; as if after all, though he had not pressed the point, it was Providence who had got into the scrape and must get out again the best way it could.

"Well, the chief thing, George," said his wife with deliberation, "seems to me that you ought to tell Bertie the whole state of affairs."

"Yes, I must tell *him* unquestionably;" and he looked his wife rather absently in the face.

"Don't you think you had better tell him at once?" she said, knowing well that absent look.

"At once, yes. That is to say, of course there's no immediate hurry. Still, he ought to be told, no doubt; and I dare say the sooner the better, the sooner the better."

"Aren't you incurring liabilities yourself still as long . . ."

"Not now," he answered, briskly, "not now that Netley's let. You see, it isn't the rent only, but Higgins and Somerby and the rest. They're off our hands now."

"But Bertie's allowance; who pays for that?"

"Bertie's allowance? Well, of course he must have an allowance, poor boy. I tell you what," he said; "you're a regular curmudgeon, my dear. That's what you are; a regular old curmudgeon, ha, ha!" and he took hold of her chin with one hand, and with the other fingered the bulbs in his loose pocket.

"No, George, I am not;" she laid her hand on the flap of

his coat, and at the same time managed to intervene between him and the door; "indeed I am not. Poor Bertie! I am sure if he were in want I should not grudge him my last sixpence. Only, I don't think it is fair upon him to be kept in ignorance of the real state of affairs."

"No, no; I say of course he must be told. You're quite right about that. As soon as I've had another good talk with Wheatley I shall certainly tell him."

And Mrs. Vanlennert had to be content with this result of the conference.

Meantime Molly and Bertie had made their way along the well-known field path, past Amwell's quarry and over the Stretton Road. Then they plunged into Netley Wood. The side of the house was visible through the trees and the out-buildings behind it. From thence came multitudinous sounds of activity, the barking of dogs, the neighing of horses. To Molly it all seemed very strange and sad. From quite her early childhood this path, the shortest way to the hall, had been full of happy associations; but more happy ever since the day on which she, a girl of eight, had been taken over to see her new cousin, a timid, fretful, wide-eyed, sallow urchin, tall for his age, who had taken to her before he took to anyone else. Instinctively she glanced at Bertie now to compare her present impression with the distant memory which had come surging back. How little *he* seemed to feel the change! What a glow there was in his face! what a brightness in his eyes! That was just what she had foreseen. But how silly, when he had only seen Silvia three or four times. Really, boys were too absurd for anything. They deserved all they got. *They*, yes; but not poor Bertie, whom she always thought of as her boy. She did not like these Tennants much; but if he wanted anything very much she would do what she could to help him to get it.

There they were, Gertrude and Silvia, just coming round the wall of the garden. A man-servant came after them carrying rugs and two chairs. William, the under gardener, brought two others, on which he had been fixing runners. . . .

Like an echo from the voice of the sirens or of deep-caved mermaids came the sound of skates upon the ice, which was returned by the woods or high rocks. Bertie's siren was beside him, moving like a spirit over bottomless deeps. At the end, where the water approached the limestone rock, Bertie showed

Silvia exactly where their voices came back to them the clearest. And Silvia was in brighter spirits than she was wont to be: her laugh rang out not less musically than the ring of the steel on the ice. A little snow had fallen. The surface of the pond, which had been swept, showed an unfathomable black, and black too were the branches of the trees seen from below. But everywhere else was a thin white garment which sent forth sparkles in the sunlight.

In truth, it was a blissful day, a day of days.

They had their lunch brought out to them, and soon after Lady Tennant appeared upon the scene. She was very pleasant in her rather languid way. Crawford was expected down that afternoon, and that gave Bertie an additional reason for staying. But as it was only two days before Christmas, Molly declared that she must go back now.

"Oh, the soup tickets or whatever they are will wait an hour or two," said her cousin. "One doesn't get as an average more than one day's skating a year now-a-days."

"Are the times changing so much for the worse in that respect?" said Lady Tennant. "It seems to me we have plenty of cold now-a-days at all events."

"I should have thought you preferred hunting," said Silvia.

"So I do when I am hunting, and skating when I am skating," said Bertie in his bright way.

Molly, however, insisted on going. "Of course I can find my way back." . . . "Oh, dear, no, thank you," she said to Bertie, who made a half offer to accompany her, and to Gertrude, who asked if she would like a maid.

Molly walked back to Gretton and discharged herself of her parish duties, full of many thoughts. At dusk she returned to the house, and found her mother counting her stitches and the moments till she could conscientiously ring for tea. Five o'clock tea was Mrs. Vanlennert's only conspicuous weakness.

"What have you done with Bertie?" she said, brightening up as Molly entered.

"Oh, I left *him* at Netley long ago," said Molly. "I've been an hour decorating, and then I went to see Mrs. Gedge, and I promised her . . . and when I came out I met Bainbridge; he says . . ." etc., etc.

"You left Bertie at Netley?" said Mrs. Vanlennert, meditatively, stretching out her knitting. She was too much occupied

by her thoughts to pay attention to Molly's tone of voice. "Your father has been talking to me about Bertie," she continued after a slight pause. "I am afraid his affairs really are what in the case of another person one would call embarrassed. It seems very hard. For I'm sure your grandfather could not be accused of extravagance. And yet, there it is; the estate doesn't yield anything at all just at present."

"Nothing at all! But how do you mean?"

"No, I'm afraid not. Of course I don't exactly know what becomes of the money. There are what are called charges on the property which have to be paid first before anybody else gets anything—so I understand. Poor Harry, your poor uncle, of course left a heap of debts when he died; and I suppose your grandfather paid them off. And then there was Edmund; he has been a terrible trouble to us all."

"But, mother, I don't understand. What is Bertie living on now?"

"Hush! What did you say to Bainbridge?" she asked; for Susan came in with the tea at that moment.

When they were alone again she took up the interrupted thread.

"What is Bertie living on? Why, just at present upon nothing. Your father pays . . . That is to say, he just has his allowance. That is all."

"How dreadful! But why do you say 'At present'? Will it be better soon?"

"Oh, of course we hope so. Your father hopes so."

"Has it been long as bad as that?"

"It was worse before Netley was let to these Tennants."

"Poor Bertie!" said Molly, with an expressive sigh.

But her mother, as her manner was, pursued the train of her own thoughts. She was a person of deliberation, not of weakness. "Don't you think," she said at last, "Bertie is rather . . . might possibly . . . fall in love with Silvia Tennant?"

"Oh, my dear mother, have you only just thought of that? I should not say that it was 'might possibly' at all. I am afraid it will prove a terrible misfortune for him, poor boy, if he does, and he's as poor as you say."

"But don't you think she would be well off? You see there is only one son; and I've always understood that Sir William Tennant was very rich indeed."

"Well, then they'll *never* let her marry Bertie in that case."

"Oh, well, you know they are nobody particular. Lady Tennant was Lucy Reid. Your father remembers her quite well when she was young. She was niece of the Mr. Reid of Burton Pynsent of those days. I should think she's second cousin to Mr. Gilbert Reid."

"Still, that doesn't make any difference now. I don't think you understand what smart people they consider themselves now."

"Of course," Mrs. Vanlennert went on, keeping fast hold of her own train of thought, "your father hopes that Bertie's affairs may soon get much better. And I believe the very thing that is wanted is a little money just now."

"Oh, I don't think there's a chance of his getting it that way."

"I must say from what I've seen of her I like that Silvia Tennant."

"Yes, I do like Silvia," said Molly.

"Mrs. Forster is rather an imposing person, I confess."

"There are two ways of being imposing," Molly said, setting down her cup, but rather to herself than to her mother, who had just begun upon a new row.

Then there was a pause.

"But, mother . . ." Molly began.

"Yes, dear?"

"Why do you talk about Bertie being poor *at present* and things getting all right soon?"

"That's what we hope, what your father hopes."

"But *why* does he hope so?"

"Wheatley hopes so, everybody hopes things will be better soon, you know. Captain Banbury was saying the same last week. He says if things remain as bad as they are he doesn't see how they are to get on. Of course when everybody else's affairs improve Bertie's will improve too."

CHAPTER V.

MOLLY and Silvia would very likely have been on kissing terms by this time. But three things intervened: Mrs. Forster was rather a check; they did not live in the same parish, and so had no parochial work to draw them together; and, thirdly, they were not quite at one in their church views. Of course

both considered themselves good churchwomen, and thought much of church work; but Silvia's form of good churchism was that of London, at any rate of the home counties. It was as different from the form which obtained generally in Derbyshire as town-made dresses are different from those which Molly got from Mrs. Snail, of Burton Broadway; that is to say, to the unsophisticated eye they might seem to be composed of the same ingredients, but not to the knowing. There are, however, exceptions to every rule; and Mr. Basil Lyme, of Netley Vicarage (it was an Oriel living) was a quite different type of "parish priest" from Uncle George. After one or two trials of the ministrations at Gretton, Silvia Tennant never could be got to go there any more.

"I must say I am glad we are not in Mr. Vanlennert's parish," she said, as the brother and two sisters were walking back from church on Christmas morning. Crawfurd had come down two days before, and Silvia had succeeded, once in a way, in bringing him to church. "It is so nice having a really good church service in the country, and sitting among the congregation in that simple way."

"I didn't think much of the sermon I must say," said Mrs. Forster, who inclined to the religion of most Anglo-Indians.

"Oh, I thought it very nice and suitable," said Silvia.

"At all events," said Crawfurd, "it wasn't one of those sermons from which you seem to carry nothing away; for I've brought two fleas away with me."

"Crawfurd!" said Mrs. Forster.

"So that youth I saw the other day was your landlord," said Crawfurd, that same afternoon. He was sitting in a low deep chair in the hall, close by the fire, smoking a cigarette. Beside him the oaken torso of a wild man rising from an expanding pedestal held up one end of the wooden mantelpiece, and at his back the declining sun threw the brilliant pattern of a coat of arms upon the wall. Gertrude sat on the opposite side of the fireplace holding a peacock screen in one hand and with a book in her lap. Between them a huge log was blazing.

"Yes," Gertrude answered, looking up for a moment. And then, after a slight pause, "I don't know whether he intends to stay here I'm sure. I hope not much longer."

"Why so?"

"Well, you see we must be friendly with him and that, as he lives so near, and then . . ."

"And he's a bore. I should think that's likely enough."

"No. That wasn't what I meant;" and here she sat more upright and looked straight across at her brother. "I wish I thought he was more of a bore to Silvia."

"But you don't mean that that boy's a *soupirant* after Silvia?" said Crawford, also rousing himself a little.

"Of course it wouldn't do. We've really seen very little of him yet. But I am afraid, in fact, I've no doubt in my own mind that, as far as he is concerned, he is or soon will be. And I think Silvia likes him too, rather. It *would* be a pity if our coming down here, which seemed such a nice thing, should lead to any trouble of that sort."

"Still, I don't see any particular objection to him," said Crawford.

"I'm afraid he is much poorer than we thought at first. I am almost afraid, from what I hear, that it will be impossible for him ever to live here; in fact, that his income will be a very small one indeed."

"Bless me! Of course that alters the matter. You must look out, certainly. I can easily find out about that while I am down here: at any rate I will find out what I can. I shall get the long and the short of the matter out of the agent—what's his name?—Whateley, I expect; or if not, I can call on some of the farmers. That will serve to show how the land lies. Or the parson—the uncle, I mean; not Silvia's friend St. Anthony." Crawford dropped something of his nonchalant way of speaking when with Gertrude.

"Most of what I learnt I *did* hear from Mr. Lyme."

"Well, I suppose you told Silvia what you know."

"No. Silvia's very romantic, and, of course, she's very young."

"Oh, she's not such a fool as that, I expect. I should certainly tell her he's a no-go—a detrimental, or whatever you call it—if I were you. . . . However, I suppose you know best," he added, magnanimously, leaning back once more and opening his novel.

Whether it was that Crawford Tennant was to Bertie as Cæsar's ghost to Brutus, I do not know. But it is certain that after the day of the skating party, in which these two first met, the affairs of Bertie Vanlennert took a steady turn for the worse. The first trouble was that a week passed without his seeing Silvia, save by meeting her once in the road. During that week he was

obliged to turn his attention to business, and gained some insight into his affairs. He gained no more than an inkling: it was impossible to him in his present condition to go through all the accounts which Wheatley submitted to him. Even the general bearings of them he hardly recognised till he had had some conversation with Molly.

In old Mr. Vanlennert's days the Park stood in a position of unquestioned superiority to the Rectory. And Herbert, though the least conceited of men, had inherited enough of this feeling to prevent him from naturally turning for advice or assistance to Uncle George. It was impossible for him to guess, nor would Uncle George or Wheatley or anyone else have dreamt of showing him how completely the relation of things had been reversed during the last two years. The fact that Bertie owed the most part of his very pocket-money to his uncle had not been made clear even to Molly.

But no feeling of inequality had marred the relations of Bertie with those of his own generation, Molly and Gerard and Frank. The previous generation are always taken one with another "a set of duffers" to the adolescent one. Moreover, Molly was Molly: she would always stand in a class apart. To her Bertie naturally turned: and it was only after his talk with her that he began to understand that life was rapidly changing all its bearings for him, and that those rather tentative efforts which he had made at choosing a profession must, the sooner the better, issue in something positive.

There was a third cause of trouble graver than any of these. He was only on a visit to the Rectory, and the duration that he had originally fixed for this had already run out. Molly, disregarding her own pleasure, would have been glad to see him depart before Silvia's eyes and hair had done more mischief. There were, of course, the Orchers, to whom he had also promised a visit: and a fortnight ago that seemed in prospect only less attractive than his stay at Gretton. But now the two places were poles asunder. Gretton was only two miles from Netley; Roundway Temple was ten. In point of intimacy the relative distance of the two places was much greater. Bertie's departure from Gretton was finally fixed for the Monday next but one after Christmas. On his last Saturday the whole Gretton party were invited once more to dine at Netley, but only Bertie and Molly went. It was on that very day that they had their talk about Bertie's affairs, and the spirits of the latter were depressed to begin with.

Bertie was reminded by the appearance of things of those state dinners which had been the joy and terror of his boyhood, but which had been discontinued for the last two years of his grandfather's life. He and Molly walked over in the crisp frosty night. The door was opened by the London butler, who looked at the pedestrians rather superciliously as he let them in. Bertie changed his shoes in a small room under the stairs devoted in his time to fishing-tackle and other odds and ends. At the moment that he emerged, a large and important-looking lady was coming down-stairs followed by a still fatter gentleman of prepossessing ugliness.

"I assure you I do not the least expect him to-morrow. I shall get another telegram to-morrow morning, you'll see." (She walked and spoke slowly to give time to her companion, who was just one step behind her and came down leaning one hand heavily on the broad banister.) "How glad you must be, Sir Roper, that you are out of all that!"

"I am, indeed"—he spoke in a fine port-wine manner—"and yet you see it wasn't nearly so serious a thing with me. I had no anxious wife at home and . . ." (Here he caught sight of Bertie's head.)

"Don't be satirical," said the imposing lady. Then she, too, caught sight of Herbert and put up her glasses to look at him.

Molly came back half a minute later, and the two followed upon the heels of Sir Roper Smyth and Mrs. Everard.

How odd it was going into the drawing-room that he knew so well and seeing nothing but strange faces there! There were the white and gold panels just as of yore, with the misformed unnatural curvatures of their mouldings. Even as a child Bertie, though he had wondered and admired, could not refrain from criticising those heavy bars of gold supported upon ropes of gilt leaves and flowers. Bertie knew just the place beyond the mantelpiece where some of the gilding had come off, and where his astonished childish eyes beheld mere common wood beneath.

There were the two Poussins on the opposite wall, hanging side by side, and the Morland beside the fireplace. There was the overmantel in its faded pink and lace; there were the pink and gilt chairs: the two tapestry ones. It was just as he had always seen it. But for the first time Bertie realised that it was now all given up to strangers.

For though the drawing-room was pretty full, almost all the persons present were unknown to the Vanlennerts; Netley had

in this short interval so greatly changed its character. In the course of the week which followed the arrival of Crawford the house had filled with a number of guests such as West Derbyshire did not often see in its midst: men distinguished in art and literature, one or two legal luminaries, and the wife of a member of the government. The right honourable gentleman himself had been expected that Saturday. But a telegram had just been received to say that he could not get down till the day following.

Lady Tennant greeted the two Vanlennerts rather languidly. She had apparently lost her interest in the Netley ghosts by this time—and she turned back to listen to what Sir Roper Smyth had just begun to say to her. Silvia alone was as cordial as ever. But she was in the act of taking off an Indian bracelet to show to a very fashionably-dressed young lady with eyes *à fleur de tête* who stood beside her near the fire. Mr. Lyme, the Vicar, and his daughter were the only persons among the guests whom they knew. Molly at once fell into a conversation on parochial matters with Edith Lyme.

“Encore des *cléricks*,” said an old-young Frenchman with an apostolic face and haggard eyes, who had seen them enter. He was standing rather apart in the embrasure of a window talking to Crawford Tennant. “Quelle bonne aubaine pour moi, qui me promets d’étudier ici tous les mondes.” And whether that was meant as a direct statement or as a sarcasm he himself did not know.

M. Victor Desanges was a novelist and journalist, already celebrated in his own country. In common with the small school of French writers to which he belonged he prided himself on his knowledge of English literature and on introducing le “English irony” into his writing and conversation. But he confessed to himself with some envy that he should never be able to attain to Crawford Tennant’s impassive manner.

Crawford himself only glanced over his shoulder and went on in a low voice with a narrative which, whatever its character, had the effect of making M. Victor’s eyes glisten.

Bertie did not sit by Silvia this time. He took in the smart-looking young lady with eyes *à fleur de tête*, no less a person, he found out, than the daughter of Churton, the celebrated painter. Even Bertie, who knew nothing of the fame of Henry Maynard, was familiar with that of Churton. Though he wanted to talk about Silvia Tennant, the way he took was by asking something about the lesser artist. “I met a very

nice chap, a painter, in Switzerland last September," he began. "I wonder whether you know him—his name's Maynard."

"I'm afraid I don't understand much about pictures," his partner answered. She was looking away from him almost all the time she spoke.

"No, I don't *understand* about pictures either. Of course I go to the academy when I'm in town if it's open."

To this remark Miss Churton made no immediate reply. "Of course I like papa's," she said, after a moment of silence.

"You don't go in for painting yourself, do you?"

Here his partner turned round on him suddenly as if he had said something *inconvenant*.

"Oh, no!" she said, emphatically.

"Miss Tennant"—he now saw the opportunity of introducing Silvia's name—"seemed to know Maynard's name very well as a painter."

"How pretty she's looking, isn't she?"

"Yes, very," said Herbert delighted at the turn the conversation had taken.

"Oh! yes. . . . He's a friend of papa's," said his partner. Her tone implied that to be "a friend of papa's" was a very different thing from being a friend of the Churton family.

"Who? oh, Maynard. . . . Is Miss Tennant? . . . " Bertie was beginning a question about Silvia. But Miss Churton gave him no time to finish.

"Do you ever go abroad?" she said.

"I've not been much," he answered, rather losing his breath; for he had just told her how he met the Maynards in Switzerland.

"Do you know Lord Claridge?"

"No, I don't."

"He has the villa next to ours at Cannes. Have you ever been to Cannes?"

"No, I've never been to the Riviera and that part at all."

"We nearly always go to Cannes for the winter, that is to say, mama and ourselves. My sisters are there now. Do you know my sisters by any chance?" And this time she turned her head so that she could really look at her neighbour. Bertie thought how fat and yet how wooden her neck looked. Her head was small by comparison.

Bertie was obliged to own that he did not know the Miss Churtons.

"I want papa to give up our villa at Cannes and take one

at Mentone or San Remo. They're much nicer, don't you think so?"

"I am afraid I don't know, as I've never been there?"

"Oh, dear, shan't you go soon? I should advise you to go. Do you like yachting?"

"Yes: what I've had. I went out one vac. with a . . ."

"Oh, well, I adore it. Lord Claridge—do you know him?—has such a sweet little yacht. He took us out in it last year. They're great allies of ours. We went for a week round the coast, and then to Sardinia and Corsica. Isn't Corsica lovely?"

Presently she turned to speak to her neighbour on the other side, and over Bertie's head passed whiffs of a more general conversation which was being carried on by some of the other guests.

"Oh, Champion. I give you up, Champion," said Mrs. Everard. "I mean to talk to . . ."

"Not in the house, though. You couldn't possibly spare him. He's the fine essence of the old ten-pound householder," said Sir Roper.

"Is he *assommant*?" said Desanges in English. "I talked with 'im the other day with Tennant 'ere. He talked, he talked . . ."

"About getting rid of the hereditary principle," put in Crawford.

"And I asked him if the 'ereditary principle was not justly the foundation of all modern philosophy. . . . He was quite angry. . . ."

"Nobody understands the meaning of heredity better than our friend Kingdon," said Crawford to Churton. "He went to India for a few months, and ever since then he has painted Indian beauties from memory. He thinks because his grandfather and his great-uncle were both Lieutenant-Governors there that it comes natural to him somehow."

"Oh, your art! . . ." Victor was beginning; but Mrs. Forster hurriedly asked him a question in French, and for a minute or two he was left out of the general conversation. . . .

"Is Champion the actor any relation of his?" another oldish lady was saying.

"He can't be: he's delightful," said Mrs. Everard. "Besides, I think I've heard he's quite a gentleman, that he was at Eton or somewhere like that."

"I don't think so," said Lady Tennant. "Lady Ambrose was telling me about him. His father was their steward . . ."

"You don't say so?" said Mrs. Everard, disappointed.

"I don't mean the house steward," Lady Tennant said in her low fatigued voice. "He was the land steward. I've no doubt he would have his son very well educated."

"But so many actors are gentlemen now-a-days, aren't they?" said Mrs. Everard, whose father was a Manchester manufacturer. . . . "Did you see Tennyson's play, M. Desanges?" she said, turning to Victor.

"Yes. I saw it and I have read it. Ça ne vaut pas grand' chose. But Queen Mary, that is *fine*. . . . There are passages . . . But it is too *literary*, you know."

"It smells of the lamp, you mean, as we say," said Sir William Tennant, speaking almost for the first time.

"Justement," Victor nodded assent.

Bertie pricked up his ears at this. They had got upon a subject which he could understand, which really interested him. The last observation made him think; and, as he saw that Crawford was going to speak, he hoped that something might be said to clear up the matter.

But Crawford began upon quite a different matter.

"What a fine actor you've got in Mounet Sully!" he said. "I saw him in 'Marion Delorme' a week or two ago."

"Ah! yes. But they say his sight is affected. And he was to 'ave played in the piece I 'ave there now. They 'ave begun to repeat it. What an atrocious misfortune! Figure it! What can I do without Mounet?"

All the conversation going on gave to Vanlennert the impression of assisting at some magical game of ball, in which something was constantly passing over his head in such a way that he had not the power of discovering of what nature it was.

This simile came into his head, as he finally resigned himself to eating the rest of his dinner in silence. And some fragments of a verse of Cowley's ending with "Bertha caught the flying ball," were still troubling his memory when the ladies rose to go.

After they had gone, he suddenly found, rather to his dismay, that the Frenchman had sat down next him, evidently for the sake of engaging him in conversation.

"C'est vous, monsieur, me dit-on," M. Victor began to his neighbour, "qui êtes l'heureux propriétaire de ce joli parc et de ce délicieux *countri'ouse*; toutes mes félicitations."

"Oui, merci," replied Bertie.

"Vous me pardonnerez—n'est-ce pas?—ma question, mais la

vie de campagne anglaise a pour nous autres Français un très-vif intérêt," continued the other.

"Oh, oui; je suppose ainsi," replied his companion, all his faculties absorbed in trying to understand what was said to him. Vanlennert saw Crawford Tennant's heavy eyes fixed on him; and though it was hard to say that they had any particular expression, he resented the look.

Next time Desanges spoke it was in English, and the rest of the conversation was carried on in that language. And, though it had begun in mere banalities, almost in spite of himself, Victor began to take an interest in the subject and in his companion.

"What we admire especially," he said in his suave tones, "about you English is your inexhaustible energy. We enjoy the fields and the flowers, yes; but you, directly you come in the campaign you must be at work, above all you must kill something; only then you begin to be 'appy."

"I know; that is what you always say and the way you look at things. And it's true in a certain sense," said Herbert. "But it isn't only the killing things which gives the pleasure to sport. It's an act of taking possession of the country. Perhaps you don't understand what I mean." He stopped himself.

"Not altogether," said the other, leaning forward with a still greater air of attention.

"I fancy from what I've read that you never really care for country life in France. If you arrange hunting parties, it is for the sake of killing things and nothing more. And you seem to take guns with you," he added, losing the thread of his ideas and not having mastered the mysteries of the word "chasse."

"No, not more than you. When you 'unt on foot you take guns, n'est-ce pas? We too 'unt on horseback—à courre we call it—though I do not know myself in that. But to come back," continued M. Victor (he wondered at himself for wanting to come to the bottom of this rigmarole; but he was a physiogomist, and something in Bertie's face encouraged him to proceed), "to come back: this act of taking possession of the country—was not that what you said?—I begin to understand. The right to chase is the right of the landlord to the—the—manor; and you would say you assert that right by your sporting, is it that?"

"That isn't exactly what I meant. It's like going out with the drag at Cambridge—but you wouldn't understand that,"

Bertie went on, half to himself. "What I mean is this," he added after a moment's pause, during which M. Desanges remained in polite but altogether bewildered attention. "Of course there are a great many Englishmen who only care for sport as sport, you understand: who go to hunt where the hunting is best, and from one part of the country to another to shoot and so on. But there are a great many more who only really care to hunt in their own country and shoot their own game and so on. And we've an idea," he added, with one of his peculiarly bright smiles, "that the foxes like being hunted and the game likes being shot by the people they are used to."

"It is probable," said Victor, "seeing they are English foxes and English pheasans."

"I don't suppose that anyone but a Scotchman really cares for deer-stalking, for instance," Bertie continued; "though they say that millionaires and Americans are buying up all the deer-forests."

"I comprehend you now, perfectly," said M. Victor in a tone of sympathy which Bertie could not in the least understand. And at that moment Victor's views of his neighbour, of his hosts, of Crawford Tennant, of the evening's conversation, and of himself in relation to these things went through a complete transformation, though I do not say the transformation lasted very long.

At last, in the drawing-room, Bertie got his chance. He went straight up to Silvia directly he came into the room, and she turned round gladly enough to talk to him.

"I suppose I shall hardly see you again," he said, gloomily.

"Oh, are you going away, Mr. Vanlennert? I'm very sorry."

It was a pity she spoke out so loud: because Gertrude was passing near them at the moment. And she stopped to say the same.

"Are you leaving Derbyshire, Mr. Vanlennert? How unkind of you, when we have been here such a short time," Mrs. Forster said.

"Not Derbyshire altogether. I'm going for a fortnight to Roundway Temple."

"Is that far?"

"It's the Orchers, you know."

"Oh, yes, I remember. Mrs. Orcher called on my mother last week. Well, it's within a ride at any rate. You mustn't desert us altogether you know," and she passed on.

"It makes a great deal of difference though between two miles and ten," Bertie said in the same tragic fashion to Silvia.

"Yes, I think it's horrid of you to go away so soon," she said in a kind voice.

"Do you think I might come in to-morrow afternoon?" he said.

"Of course. Do. We shall be sure to be in at five. I always go to church in the afternoon."

There was nothing very brilliant in this conversation. But it was a great comfort to Bertie, and would have made him forget any of the little slights that had been put upon him, had he noticed them, which he had not.

"Your attempt at a conversation with the young proprietor was not crowned with much success, so far as I could hear," said Crawford to their French guest at breakfast next morning.

"Mais si: c'est un jeune homme charmant et fort intelligent que le 'squire,'" replied Victor, enthusiastically.

Silvia blushed with pleasure. "I do so dislike that sneering way of Crawford's," she said to herself.

"Je suppose ainsi," said her brother.

Victor laughed. "On peut être intelligent et ne pas savoir le français, tout étrange que cela paraisse," he said.

At afternoon church next day Silvia kept her eyes steadily on her book and performed her genuflexions with rigid accuracy. It must have been some sixth sense that made her aware that there arrived a few minutes late an unusual member among the congregation. It was quite natural for Bertie to come to Netley church once more before he went away. He sat somewhat behind Silvia, and therefore got out of church the first. In the little crowd in the porch Silvia, as she emerged, heard one or two remarks passed about the "young squire," all of a friendly or even flattering kind, and these made Bertie's figure stand out more picturesquely than on an ordinary occasion. But Silvia was cautious and timid; so she was glad that she had thought that morning of asking the Lymes to come across to tea also.

CHAPTER VI.

THE end of January saw Vanlennert established in London. He now understood fully that until his affairs mended it was necessary for him to do what was possible in the matter of earning a livelihood. His profession was to be the bar. But as he had not yet been called, there seemed no way of testing Fortune at present. Unless, indeed, he were to earn something by literature: he had heard of such a thing being done by barristers waiting for briefs. But that seemed rather a possibility to be cherished in dreams than a matter for sober consideration. For to Herbert at this time all the territory of literature, the highest mountains and the most commonplace plains, made an enchanted land.

At Eton and at Trinity he had been among his own set noted for his bookish tastes, a fact which had tended to limit the number of his friends: for bookish tastes are incompatible with that proficiency in outdoor exercises to which alone mankind accords any genuine admiration. He rode, of course: old Mr. Vanlennert would have thought that his grandson was not having the education of a gentleman if from the day when he came to live at Netley he had not been accustomed to the saddle; and Bertie had kept a horse at Cambridge. Beside this he was an excellent runner and had won a flat race or two at Tanner's. But in respect of the two main pillars on which the fabric of school and university athletics rest, he was at best only an occasional conformer. The freshmen's river knew him better than the regular course; and he was more often seen in a raquet or a tennis-court than on the Trinity cricket-ground. In the summer-time he had loved better than any other pursuit to lie close-huddled in his canoe beside the grass-plot of Kings or beneath the limes of Trinity, devouring book after book, chosen on very little principle from the Union or the University Library. Not the tastes of those who are born to literature moved him so much as an immense curiosity. For here it seemed opened the door into a new world. He had no guide in his reading, and not much principle of selection. He read Dyer's *Modern Europe* alongside of Lecky's *History of Rationalism* or *European Morals*: Herschel's *Principles of Astronomy* might be followed by *Doctor Faustus*, and *Vanity Fair* by Mill's *Political Economy* or Herbert

Spencer's *First Principles*. Only one rule was imperative with him in those days: he read nothing for pleasure in any language but his own. A certain instinct kept him from reading much by second-rate authors. And if he forgot three parts—say rather ninety-nine-hundredths—of what he read, a certain ruminating turn, which only those who knew him intimately had any idea of, and a large endowment of intellectual honesty (which means originality) prevented him from reading anything wholly without profit.

At the university Bertie had never thought of going in for honours. It did not belong to the traditions of his "set." And it is not likely that all his reading would have enabled him to obtain distinction in any one of the many triposes which now-a-days offer to the choice of the ambitious undergraduate. For another sort of examination, that tripos called Life, his miscellaneous reading had in some sense prepared him, but whether advantageously or not must remain a questionable matter.

All that can with confidence be said was that those days and nights of desultory study had given to Herbert Vanlennert the taste of a pleasure such as he was never destined to know again, such as in its fulness can only be enjoyed at one time of life when the world is still unknown and everything is to learn. Then love was not, nor passion. For Bertie was young for his age and of an unblemished innocence of character. And wanting love there was no sense of emulation and rivalry with his fellow-men, none of the black blood which springs therefrom. There was no temptation to him to wish anything changed in his lot. It was perhaps rather a lonely one, nobody at home but his grandfather, who was indulgent and cold: and nobody but Molly—who had two brothers of her own—to supply the place of a sister. But he never felt this loneliness, not enough even to divine that his happiness was really a greater concern to Molly than that of her brothers, who seemed to need her motherly protection less. He had not learnt yet to desire this man's art and that man's scope as he was to learn in after-years. Knowing as yet nothing of the miseries of life, he had no cause to feel ashamed at being placed so much out of their reach.

Vanlennert set up his tabernacle in St. James Place. It ought rather to have been in Bloomsbury or Notting-hill, seeing that his own income was practically nothing at all. But the existence of these outlying quarters was hardly known to Herbert or his friends. He could only go by the information at com-

mand. So there in his second floor he sat, when he sat alone, like a young Alexander plotting to conquer the world, or a solitary Vulcan forging thunderbolts. With a strange mixture of exaltation and diffidence, he saw himself for the first time face to face with life. It was almost better to be thus preparing his successes than to be at Roundway Temple; during that part of his visit he had only seen Silvia twice: now before very long—oh, delicious thought!—she would be here in London. Surely the world on every side was awakening to new and glorious birth; and he to unsuspected depths of power.

None of Vanlennert's country friends were in town; though if old Mr. Attewoode's health permitted him to attend to his parliamentary duties, his family might be expected before the end of February. Bertie renewed some old acquaintances and made some new ones among the families of school and college friends that lived in London. And before he had been in his rooms a week he remembered that his Switzerland acquaintance Maynard had given him his address and begged him to come and see him whenever he was in London.

"Come any time you like," Maynard replied to Bertie's note; "but in the morning if you can, as the days are short. You'll find me in the studio all day, foggy days excepted, as I am uncommonly busy. But I can talk just as well while I am working as not, and I shall be delighted to see you, and so will Kitty, I have no doubt."

Maynard inhabited a roomy house in the wilds of West Kensington. Naturally Herbert went to the house in which there were a good many small windows not very clean nor with very clean blinds. The servant looked surprised at seeing any one at *that* door, and she took him straight through to the back, where a covered way led to the studio. In his passage Vanlennert caught sight of two little fair-haired children, and he could hear another child crying upstairs. At the end of the short passage the maid suddenly abandoned him without a word, and he supposed that he was meant to make his way up the three steps and into the studio unannounced. On opening the studio door he was arrested by the sight of a man in a smock frock leaning forwards. It was in reality the reflection in a mirror of the principal figure in Maynard's great picture of the year, "The Ploughman's Following," the picture on which his fame at this moment chiefly rests. Then he saw Maynard

himself standing before another canvas, and just behind him a man of about the same height, but much more thickly built and with that solid cast of countenance which the French writers speak of as *une tête de médaille romaine*.

"Too red," he was saying.

"Bosh. It's no more red than your books will ever be.—Hollo, Vanlennert, you here at last. I'm awfully glad to see you. Let me introduce you to my friend Mr. Bertram. Ned, give me that chair, that's a good fellow. This is the hero who saved Kitty from a watery grave. She'll be here presently; she'll be delighted to see you."

"I am here," said Kitty, coming from behind several easels, and blushing a good deal.

"The deuce you are," said Bertram. "However, I wasn't saying that you were too red," and his eyes twinkled. (Kitty shot an angry glance in return and blushed all the more.) "I'm sure," he said, turning to Bertie, "we are all very grateful to you for rescuing Kitty from the jaws of death. What the world would be without its Kitty it is hard to realise."

"Well, if I did anything of the sort," said Bertie, "it was only by what I *said*, not by anything I *did*."

"How do you mean?" said Maynard.

"Well, she went over like a shot, you know—didn't you? Almost before I knew she had fallen, I saw her head sticking up over the edge. So I called out, 'Hold on; you're all right.' I don't know whether you heard me," he said, turning again to Kitty, who was now pale. She did not answer. "I hadn't the least idea whether you were all right or not, but I thought it the safest thing to say."

"That shows the greatest of gifts—presence of mind," said Maynard, rather sententiously. "I should have thought of the right thing to say just when it was too late."

"What's better than presence of mind in an accident like yours, do you know?" said Bertie to Kitty, to change the tone of the conversation. He was distressed to see how pale she had grown.

In reality, she had felt no sort of fright at the time; her fall had been too sudden. But the reference to it called up all sorts of terrors before her lively fancy. Now her terror took flight as quickly as it had come, and her shyness returned.

Not that Kitty Maynard, as a rule, was afflicted with shyness. She saw too many men in her father's studio to allow the race to be such a terrible one as it is to most girls just

or sixteen. But, then, she had already made up her mind Mr. Vanlennert was not as other men.

As you are here, Kitty," said her father, "you may as well do me a bit. You can talk to her, Vanlennert, to keep her good humour. She's not a good sitter at the best."

It was not an easy task to have laid upon one. Kitty entered the dais, and the pose she was obliged to take showed Bertie to see only her side face. It is still harder to sit to a side face.

"How is your ankle?" he began.

Maynard answered for her. "Quite right, I hope. I took to Morton Capes. . . . Head a little more this way. But been a long job."

"What a bore!" said Bertie, sympathetically.

Kitty shot a grateful sidelong look from under her long eyelashes. Though there was only one female face in the world

Bertie, he could not help seeing, without paying special attention to it, the exceeding beauty of this child. Her ruddy brown hair fell in straight thick masses about her shoulders. Her complexion had the peculiar richness of a thin skin, usually fair, overlaid by a tint of brown; her blue eyes suggested unsearchable depths of expression and unknown possibilities of feeling—though of that Bertie remarked nothing.

"Are you still as fond of poetry as you used to be?" he said, artfully.

"Yes."

"All girls are fond of poetry," said Maynard, rather gently. "Well, I call that flesh and blood, anyhow," he went on, presently, not before he had practically forgotten that Vanlennert was in the room. "I think I shall leave off landscape altogether and take to the figure. After all, there's no painting anything else."

"Yes. It's not bad," said Bertram, getting up and coming to look at the picture.

"Not bad! That's all you ever say. What do you know about art? So little that I wonder you have not been promoted to be an art critic."

"Promoted!" said Bertram, scornfully.

"Do you mean to say it would not be promotion? Better than that metaphysical stuff nobody ever reads. . . . Oh, Kitty, goodness' sake put your hand as you had it before! I don't mind your moving it if you'll put it back. . . . At any rate," he went on, "you know nothing about art. I heard you

the other day at the Lyons's sticking up for the old Munich painters—the most namby-pamby set of epicene idiots I ever saw or heard of.”

“Look out . . . No, I wasn't sticking up for them from the point of view of art. What I said—and that I stick to—was that though I didn't consider that their B. V. M.'s and the rest all in pale blues and greens represented what the Americans would call a high-toned piety, that they had a certain artistic value from the point of view of literature, and not of painting.”

“I don't know what you mean.”

“I can't profess to explain to such a narrow-minded ignoramus as you are. But the fact is that the Munich School and Ary Scheffer, who belongs to the same movement, have succeeded in giving expression to a certain tone of feeling which is at once mystical and *gemein*—commonplace I mean. Take, for instance, the average *Heilige Jungfrau* of the Munich School. You'll see exactly what I mean. Looked at with one eye, she is a kind of very commonplace Gretchen; looked at with the other eye, she is the German notion of womanhood in the abstract. In fact, Goethe's Gretchen herself is much the same.”

“How is the Munich Haylege Jungfrau, or whatever you call her, different from the countless preceding virgins of the middle-age Flemish and German pictures, I should like to know—Van Eyck, for instance? Except in being vilely painted instead. . . .”

“At any rate, that ideal was revived, in a certain sense, by Goethe himself; and not by Goethe only, but by Schiller quite as much, and by German literature generally, especially the ballad poetry, of which there is such a lot there. I can't easily explain what I mean . . .”

“No, of course you can't, because you don't know.”

“But the case is something like this: in English fiction, Shakespeare and so forth, each of the women has a distinct character . . .”

“Well, I should hope so.”

“Shut up. Women of the Gretchen type hardly have. They represent the eternal feminine in human nature, or, if you like, in all nature with a big N. *Das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan*. And, to come back where I began, I maintain that the Munich School is interesting because it gives, in a feeble way no doubt, an artistic form to this idea. That's the state of the case.” (And he knocked his pipe out.)

"I don't believe a word of it," said Maynard.

Edward Bertram was in the habit of giving in this way expression to his thoughts, without in the least concerning himself who were present, or whether his allusions or his quotations were understood by a single member of the company.

This was another sort of talk from that which Bertie had heard at the Tennants' dinner-table, though, not less than that did, it flew over his head. Howbeit, it interested him more, and he had ceased to look at Kitty by this time or to make any further attempts to find things to say to her. His eye wandered about the studio, taking in its cold brightness, watching the cobwebs swaying above a draught from a ventilator, looking at the succession of easels, boxes, canvasses, hanging tapestries which shut out clear views into the corners, and made the large room still larger, with some of the mystery which belongs to the broken lights of a cathedral. Only there the mystery is rich and warm; here it was garish and cold.

This was the tendency of the first vague current of Herbert's thoughts. But when Bertram came to speak about ideal womanhood, a subject which Vanlennert felt that he could understand as no one else present could possibly do, his thoughts at once rushed back to their favourite channel, and he sought to call the image of Silvia before the eye of his mind. It was a positive fact that Silvia had a little slipped out of his mind that morning; he had never once thought of her on his way to Maynard's studio.

But, as when you are trying to recall an air from last night's opera, if somebody begins playing a waltz in the next room, the two airs get inextricably blended, so just as Silvia's face, which he had not seen for three weeks, was beginning to form itself before his imagination he again looked at Kitty, and the image once more became confused. Kitty's face had assumed an attitude of deep dejection, like that of a lost soul. But this was only because her father was painting her face, and Kitty, who was a born actress, had the power of, almost without consciousness, assuming any expression that she had once had. The picture was called *Ruth*. But Ruth in this case was only a village gleaner in an English landscape. Maynard did not, as most of his contemporaries did, make it a practice to clap a studio study of flesh and blood upon a landscape which he had made elsewhere. He had last autumn, just before they went abroad—he and Kitty—made a sketch of his daughter in this attitude, amid the right surroundings. But now, in the fin-

ished picture, he was adding the details of modelling and of expression. When, a fortnight since, Kitty had first sat for the larger picture she had appropriated to herself the lines of Keats, "She stood in tears amid the alien corn." Her thoughts were then all of Bertie, whom she never hoped to see again, and she penetrated her soul with the pathos of the situation. Now, as she took the former pose, her face instinctively fell into the old expression. She was not thinking of Ruth at all at this moment. But by occasional sidelong glances at a mirror was engaged in studying the profile of Mr. Vanlennert.

Nevertheless—so powerful are the facial muscles alone in their effect upon the current of our thoughts—it seemed to Kitty as she looked that she divined some deep trouble feeding upon Bertie's youth, and all her childish heart went out in an unselfish sympathy and desire to know, and to relieve his pain. She began to weave romantic dreams as to how this could be done.

For a few moments no one spoke. And the air seemed charged with thought, as on a heavy summer's day we fancy it charged with electricity. A creak from Maynard's slippers as he moved from one leg to another, a newly awakened fly humming faintly in the skylight, were the only sounds.

Then by a commonplace remark Maynard shattered the whole impalpable fabric.

"Well, this sort of stuff won't interest Mr. Vanlennert," he said, briskly. "I suppose you haven't been abroad since you were in Switzerland last autumn."

Bertie talked for a little while, then took his leave.

"That's a nice boy," said Maynard, "when you come to know him. I've never met any one so wide-awake as he really is, and yet so guileless."

"Yes. He's a very nice face," said Bertram, in his reflective way. And Kitty listened to the remark with a thrill of assent.

"That will do for this morning—tired, Kits?" said her father for the first time, with some tenderness of manner.

"No."

"Then I am. I shall shut up now. Let's look at your drawing."

"Oh, I've not finished it yet, dads."

"What a lazy girl you are!" He spoke with no small vexation in his voice. "You'll stay to lunch, Ned?"

"No, I think I won't. It's only half-past twelve yet."

"Then I shan't, either. You can tell your mother I don't think I shall come to lunch. Now you'd better go off and do some lessons," and Maynard began to change his coat with great deliberation, looking at his picture all the while. "What did you mean by saying it's too red?"

"What I said," answered Bertram, without turning round.

"It's nothing of the sort. There's scarcely a bit of red in it. It's simply orange. Just the sky you get after a wettish day in early autumn. I made a study for it at Cromer. You say things of that kind because you think it necessary to pretend to have an opinion upon art—like those fools of art critics. . . ." Then, after a pause, "After all, it's only a pot-boiler," he added, with a sigh.

"I think it's awfully good, you know," said Bertram, coming before the canvas. "The stoop of the figure seems to me tremendously good, and the colouring too. Kitty's an awfully good sitter. She puts such a lot of expression into her face. That's half the battle."

"Yes, but it rather bothers me somehow, too. She's an uncommonly lazy girl. I want to make an artist of her, but she doesn't get on much. I tell you, if I were to go off the hooks to-morrow, those kids would go to the workhouse."

"Well, you're not likely to go off the hooks. That is to say, if you look out and don't play the fool."

"How do you mean 'play the fool'?" said Maynard, sulkily.

"You know what I mean well enough."

"Oh, I've sworn off. I drink nothing but beer now."

"I'm uncommonly glad to hear it, that's all I can say."

Then the two walked off together. But they had not got to Kensington High Street before Maynard said, "I think I shall go back now. After all, it won't do to give up all the daylight at this time of year."

"But you said you were not going to stay to lunch."

"No more I am. I shall come on to the club presently. Good-bye."

And he took a hansom back to his studio. Arrived there, he went straight to a cupboard and took out a bottle of brandy and a wine-glass, and having, as he said, sworn off, he only filled the glass two-thirds full (he called it half full) three times, and drank off the contents. Then he sat down before a bare canvas and made two or three vigorous sketches for a new picture—rubbing each one out, however, as soon as it was made.

Then he threw the charcoal away, and sat for a minute or two with his head in his hands. After that, he got up, rang for the servant, and told her to fetch a cab, and was bowled off to his club, the Hamborough, where he partook of a pint of champagne at lunch and a bottle or two of Pilsener in the course of the afternoon.

It was all above-board, however. Maynard had gone home with the full intention of utilizing the daylight, and even in that half-hour, which left the canvas as blank as at the beginning, he had done work of a kind—what perhaps not half a dozen living English artists could have done. He thought too that he was drinking nothing but beer. Those few drops of brandy didn't count, and the pint of champagne was only an extra indulgence because he felt low that day.

CHAPTER VII.

THAT power which, as Plutarch says, "by mingling good and evil has made man's life a constant change, whether it be called Tyche or Nemesis, or only the internal necessity of the things themselves," had exemplified its workings very markedly in the history of the Maynard family.

The father of Henry Maynard, the artist, had been originally a surgeon in the navy, and was a man of genius of a fashion. During his early life, amid a good deal of knocking about in many countries, he had made in a desultory way discoveries of some value in various branches of science. In his special branch—and this, if it could have been authenticated, was by far the greatest discovery of all—he claimed (and some of his friends claimed for him) that from his own observations he had distinguished the character of typhoid fever, and had embodied these observations in a communication to a medical journal many years before the younger Jenner established his reputation by the same discovery. But the medical journal in question did not print Maynard's paper. At last he printed it himself in a pamphlet. The pamphlet was not, however, published till after Maynard's death, and before it appeared Jenner had written for the *Edinburgh Journal of Medical Science* his article on "Typhoid and Typhus Fevers."

The only notice which Dr. Maynard's pamphlet obtained was

from the editor of one journal, who in speaking of Dr. Jenner's discovery wrote—

“Curiously there comes to us at this moment a pamphlet by a Mr. Maynard, a surgeon of Plymouth, setting forth the result of certain observations which seem to have a similar tendency to those so luminously explained by the distinguished physician with whose paper we are dealing. Mr. Maynard has evidently no idea of the important deductions which can be made from his observations. But this fact gives to his pamphlet, appearing at this moment, all the more value as independent and confirmatory evidence in favour of Dr. Jenner's theory.”

From this extract it is to be gathered, either that Dr. Maynard had not set forth his views very lucidly, or that he had not had in the editor of the journal a very attentive reader.

After Maynard retired from the navy he married and settled down at Plymouth. There for a time extraordinary stories were circulated of the cures which he had made. He had the good fortune to enter into partnership with a man about his own age, who if he had not Maynard's quick insight had had a sounder scientific training and possessed a more reliable character. For some time among the enlightened spirits of the town the only open question was whether Dr. Maynard or Dr. Bertram were the best opinion. The rest of the profession, the old fogies, were left to take charge of the unenlightened, who fortunately for them formed in those days the numerical majority of the inhabitants.

Before very long, however, stories began to circulate among this section which were not altogether to the credit of Dr. Maynard. Why had he suddenly appeared in Mr. Robert's the dentist's consulting-room and threatened to cane him if he kept the title “surgeon dentist” upon his door plate? “It's an insult to the cloth,” Maynard had cried; “I couldn't hold Her Majesty's commission and pass it by. . . . It's not,” he went on, suddenly changing his tone, “that I've any quarrel with you, Roberts. No, by God; you've your bread to earn: I've my bread to earn. Any man's a right to a living if he makes it honestly. I don't care a damn whether he sweeps a crossing for it or not. But—but don't let it occur again, Roberts; don't let it occur again. I couldn't pass it over, holding as I do Her Majesty's commission: I could not and I *won't* pass it over. Good-morning.”

Then there was the time when he had been summoned suddenly to New Place to attend Mrs. Featheredge in her confine-

ment, and had insisted upon visiting every horse in the stable before he would enter the house. Maynard's friends recalled the fact that he had had a sunstroke in the Caribbees. But the opposition party looked to less remote causes and talked of Irish whiskey. Then the Maynard party became silent: Dr. Bertram was called in everywhere, except by the fishermen on the Barbican, or by a country patient or two, who had escaped hearing the gossip of Plymouth.

It was in driving over in the evening to see one of the latter that Dr. Maynard had the serious gig accident from which he never recovered, dying within the twelvemonth.

After her husband's death Mrs. Maynard left Plymouth and went to live in a village a few miles inland, where living was cheap. It was expected that she and her family would be left very scantily provided for indeed. But when the accounts of the partnership were made up her income proved to be a sufficient one. And no one except the two executors, Mrs. Maynard's solicitor and Dr. Bertram, ever knew that the latter paid to the widow of his partner more than double the allowance she was legally entitled to.

Henry Maynard's recollections were of this Devonshire village where his mother had gone to live. It stood upon the banks of the Tamar. From a hill which dominated the village he could look far down the stream and see how it broadened out to meet the sea. Often had he stolen out onto that hill in earliest mornings while the elders were still abed. The actual sea was not in sight. But that broad sheet of water at the river-mouth over which the morning sun raised a golden mist represented for him the end of all things terrene, the beginning of a vast unknown world called the deep. Sea gulls flew up and down the river and settled upon the shallow water or upon the shining sand of that broad estuary. He could distinguish them thus far away as black spots in the golden sunlight.

Of such kind were his early memories. When the gulls came up to his village or followed their gardener John at his work in the garden, Henry held them for messengers from another world. In all his notions of angels were interwoven recollections of these birds.

The Maynards were the third family living actually in the village that might lay claim to the title of gentry. And, as may be fancied, socially Mrs. Maynard, the widow of a drunken surgeon, made but a poor third after Mrs. Fulgrove, the rector's wife (he

was brother to the squire of the parish), and Mrs. Bywater, the wife of a retired commander—with the rank of post captain.

The constant rivalry between Mrs. Bywater (she was the cousin of a baronet) and Mrs. Fulgrove was pleasantly diversified for both by the most condescending patronage of the Maynard family, root and branch. The mother bore it meekly, and the sisters as they grew up took energetically and sincerely to "Church work"—Devonshire is high of the high. But Henry Maynard's proud spirit rebelled. He could never remember the time when he had not been in opposition to these representatives of earthly and heavenly laws, or, as he freely confessed to himself in after-years, when he had not been at heart a radical and an atheist.

It was, I guess, in these early years that Henry Maynard gained that familiarity with and love of the English labourer's life which comes out so much in his pictures and which has earned him (not quite suitably) the name of the English Millet. To my thinking, the best picture he ever painted is "The Ploughman's Following"—a ploughman driving his share on to the brow of a hill under a grey September sky followed by a company of sea-gulls and crows.

From time to time after his tenth year Harry Maynard went to stay at Plymouth with his guardian, Dr. Bertram, whose third son Ned was about his own age. Then he renewed very dim and far-away memories of the actual sea. Later on the two boys went to Tiverton together—Dr. Bertram paying the schooling of both. From Tiverton Ned Bertram went up to Oxford with an exhibition. And from that time the characters and fortunes of the two began to take different directions, as those of boys will do when they come to manhood.

The boys were now men of forty. Yet, strangely enough, they had both kept in the estimation of their two families the respective characters which they acquired at this time of the parting of their ways. Ned Bertram, who in all his life since then had scarcely earned as many ten-pound notes as Henry Maynard had earned hundreds, was still in the eyes of his own family and of the Maynards the industrious 'prentice: Henry Maynard was still something of a *mauvais sujet*. It was almost entirely on the foundation of his exhibition to Balliol that rested Bertram's reputation for industry—in the eyes of his Plymouth friends, that is. He had been expected to do great things at Oxford, but he had not greatly distinguished himself there;

and since he left the University he had never so much as earned his living. Dr. Bertram, who was, comparatively speaking, a rich man, had got used to the fact that Ned's allowance was a perpetuity. His other three sons were doing well. Ned possessed about fifteen hundred pounds of his own, and had never asked an increase upon the modest allowance of two hundred a year which his father had made him when he first began eating his dinners for the bar. He had never practised, probably never thought of practising. All the best thoughts of his mature years had been devoted to metaphysics. The only matters which seemed to him worth serious attention were such questions as the reconciliation of the "Idea of Being" (*Dasein*) with the "Idea of Force" (*Wille*), or of the *Principium Rationis Sufficientis Cognoscendi* and the *Principium Rationis Sufficientis Fiendi*. On the subject of Experience and Will he was preparing a colossal work, not without the hope of paving a way to the reconciliations of the systems of Hegel and of Von Hartmann. For "colossal" it were perhaps better to say an "epoch-making" work: for Bertram's constant preoccupation was "to shorten what he had to say to the Athenians."

Sometimes Edward Bertram condescended to turn aside to more practical studies, such as Political Economy, Art (*Kunst* in its wide German signification), or even Theology. His papers on these subjects found their way from time to time into the monthlies or quarterlies; and by the money thus earned, and by a few weekly reviews of books dealing with his special subjects, he gained enough for his only extra expenditure, that upon his library. Did I say that Bertram earned ten pounds to his friend's hundred? At the present moment, when Maynard's reputation and his prices were just in the act of taking a sudden bound, it would be safe to estimate the market value of their respective work at ten to a thousand. Not without cause, therefore, might Maynard feel aggrieved when he realised that among those who had known the two friends the longest, Ned Bertram still retained his reputation for steadiness and diligence.

Yet—and this is more strange, considering on what human judgments are usually founded—this estimate of the two characters was the true one. Bertram's was not indeed the conventional character of the industrious 'prentice. But it was certainly the stronger one of the two. Along with an almost inconceivable indolence in some matters, he had more steadiness of purpose, more perseverance, and if genius were, as Ruskin

says, the power of work (only it isn't), he had even more genius than his friend. Though, as has been said, he had not particularly distinguished himself at the University, this was partly because he had gone to the wrong one. Philosophy has great weight at Oxford; but during his college days it held with Bertram only an equal place with his love of pure mathematics. Even at Oxford he had worked hard in his indolent fashion. He was now a man of no ordinary attainments—not a contemptible classic, a good mathematician, a sufficient French and German scholar, well-read in History, even in the history of art and literature: above all, deeply read in Philosophy in all its ramifications, historical as well as speculative.

Nobody was less of a pedant than he was, or more averse from display; and in this sense he bore the weight of his learning lightly enough. But he kept it locked behind doors whose keys were not always ready on occasion; and where a show of knowledge would have been useful or becoming he was sometimes at a loss. His heavy person and massive countenance commanded of themselves a certain respect. In early days, while he sat briefless in his chambers, his brother barristers had prophesied his future success, because his face was the ideal face for a judge. Now that notion had been long abandoned. Yet Bertram was a judge, unofficial and unsalaried. Many people came to him for advice; and though, of course, the majority rejected it when given, they were usually sorry for having done so. And the vainest among his friends got to value his good opinion more than they themselves suspected.

For Henry Maynard a University education had been out of the question. He was intended for his father's profession, and to be apprenticed to Dr. Bertram the elder; and though no promises were made, it was always hoped by his mother and designed by his guardian that he should one day come into partnership with the two Dr. Bertrams, the father and the eldest son. After two years in Plymouth Henry went up to walk the London hospitals, and it was then that he definitely abandoned his profession and decided to become an artist. His mother was thunderstruck. Dr. Bertram was secretly relieved; for Henry Maynard's manners were not of a kind likely to find favour with patients.

When Maynard first went to London, the only domestic circle to which he had any introduction was that of a cousin of his mother's, John Mouchester, a tradesman—wholesale; he called

himself a merchant—who lived in Highgate. His social position is best defined by saying that though he was a strong liberal he was not a radical; though he lived in North London he was not a dissenter, only of pronounced Evangelical opinions. Mouchester had a considerable family, chiefly of plump, blonde daughters. The youngest of these, treated as a mere baby at home, was only two years older than her second cousin; and while he was scarcely more than a beautiful, shy, passionate boy, she fell in love with him and married him out of hand.

The news of this second adventure following upon the heels of the abandonment of his natural walk in life came as a thunder-clap to three households. There is nothing really criminal in early marriages: speaking theoretically, we are wont to say that they preserve young men from a great deal of temptation. But then the temptation is decidedly the cheaper: and the persons most nearly concerned are apt to make that reflection at the bottom of their hearts.

Mr. Mouchester relented before long: probably the elder Miss Mouchesters interceded. He allowed the young couple a hundred a year, on which with another hundred from Dr. Bertram they began their housekeeping. Children, of course, came rapidly. The eldest died in the cradle. Then came Kitty. The two next to Kitty were now also dead, and six more survived. For many years the *res angustæ* continually threatened to gain the upper hand: the wholesale ironmonger had now and again to come to the rescue. By this time Poverty had been definitely driven back. Not long ago a month's work had been well rewarded by twenty pounds; now if it were a lucky month and genius were propitious it might be rewarded by a thousand.

CHAPTER VIII.

MAYNARD had been only a year and nine months installed in his present home, Redfern House, Agneta Road, West Kensington. The red-brick building, with its eleven square, square-paned front windows with green venetian blinds, stood at the corner of Agneta and Spaniard Roads; and at right angles to the house, separated by the covered way before spoken of, into which passage led another outside door, stretched the studio. It was impossible to ignore the house as a physical fact. But

only very few people knew of what the household consisted and who was the presiding spirit there. Maynard's most intimate friends dined and lunched there from time to time; Bertram alone did so pretty frequently. A week or so after his first visit to Maynard's studio, and after one subsequent visit, Vanlennert came to dinner at the house—that he should be introduced to Kitty's mother was a matter of course in Bertie's peculiar case. He was received by a good-natured, slightly common-looking lady, fat, fair, and forty, or a little more. She did not speak many words of thanks, but what she did say was well and sincerely said. Nor did she take much notice of the three other guests, who were all men, nor join in the general conversation. But in the drawing-room after dinner, when Bertie was left alone for a moment, she sat herself down rather heavily beside him, and without further prelude asked him what church he attended. Bertie had by no means given up the practice of going to church, so he answered without embarrassment that he went to St. James's, Piccadilly.

"I wish I could persuade you to go and hear Mr. Chumley at North End Chapel," she said impressively but kindly. "He is a really earnest man and preaches the gospel. Now, will you go just once? I am sure you would like him."

"I don't much think I should," said Bertie, trying to be as polite as the circumstances allowed.

"But if you were to try him just once? It could not do you any harm. If I were to ask you, just to oblige me, would you go?"

"Well, of course, if you really . . ."

But luckily for Bertie here Maynard came up nervously and dragged him off. "Come and have a smoke in the studio: we're all going there now." And he walked off without taking the slightest notice of his wife.

She gave a sigh, a very slight one, which yet somehow smote upon Bertie's ear. "Good-night, Mrs. Maynard," he said. But she had taken up her knitting again and was lost in reverie.

"After all, I might have said I'd go," Bertie said to himself. "It would not have hurt once in a way. I think I will next Sunday." But on his way to the studio he remembered to his relief that she had never given him the address of the place: North End Chapel might be anywhere. "That was her fault," he said to himself. "I am not bound to go back and ask for it."

For all that, the remembrance of Mrs. Maynard's little sigh and her subsequent self-absorption left for long afterwards a slight painful impression on Bertie's mind as though he had been guilty of some tort in regard to her.

Every now and again would Mrs. Maynard single out, like the Ancient Mariner, one or another of her husband's guests for an attack of this kind. She did not assail all indifferently, as most of her order do, "doing her Master's work without respect of persons," as she would have phrased it. That perhaps was her theory of right conduct; but that course was not hers. What in most cases determined her selection I do not know. She affirmed that she was "led," and had no doubt about the divine guidance. It was generally upon young men that her choice fell. Young Mr. Henderson with the snub nose, young Mr. Shadwell with the straggly black beard, had been persuaded out of pure good-nature absolutely to sit (with much nudging and giggling) through one of Mr. Chumley's discourses. Mr. Henderson and Mr. Shadwell were both young painters who flattered Maynard with the best and worst form of flattery, a slavish imitation reaching almost the point of caricature. They believed that they had an unbounded admiration for their master; and never admitted to themselves that it was really Kitty whom they came to see.

To Maynard's friends, as a rule, his wife was notable only for the embarrassing tendency to ask after their salvation: otherwise she passed for a good-natured nonentity. She was a perpetual thorn in her husband's side, on account of what he called this religious mania of hers. But a kind of shame prevented him from ever quarrelling with her on the subject; a dim sense that her convictions were fundamentally as respectable as his want of conviction. By this time he had come to regard her in much the same light that his friends did, as a good-natured nobody with a religious craze: albeit an inner consciousness kept him aware that this estimate was a shallow one.

In the midst of her own household Mrs. Maynard occupied a very different status, and the relative positions of husband and wife were there reversed. The most part of the children hardly knew their father. But their mother they adored, for all that she ruled them strictly enough. She was always snubbing, if not them, the Old Adam in them. But in despite of

that, they never seemed to feel snubbed or depressed. This arose from the fact that Mrs. Maynard was one of those women born to be mothers, who, however unwisely they may seem to behave, can hardly go wrong.

Kitty was the only exception to Mrs. Maynard's tale of success. Kitty like all the others had gone through the days of adoration for her mother, thinking her the best and most beautiful of created beings, thinking any task that was laid upon her a privilege and not a trouble. Nay, she had gone farther in her adoration than any of the others had done.

"Oh, mummy, you are beautiful," Kitty would often say in those early days.

Her idea of the perfection of beauty was then a woman stout, fair, not more than thirty-five, with hair of a monotonous yellow, rippling over a white forehead, cheeks of an unchanging pink, and light-blue eyes which for their somewhat visionary look formed the most striking feature of Mrs. Maynard's face; an irregular nose, thin rosy lips, a small salient chin tending to doubleness.

"You are beautiful and I do love you."

"Earthly beauty is of no consequence," her mother would reply. "And I want you to love God more than you love me."

Not seldom when once started she would enlarge upon the theme—

"Think how little I can do for you; and whatever I can give you comes to me from God. But God can give you everything. It was He who gave you your father and mother and Henry and Annie and little Lilly and baby."

But it so happened that Kitty was profoundly jealous of little Lilly, who was her mother's favourite next after the baby. The baby of the family was always the one on whom Mrs. Maynard lavished the full flow of her affection—instinctively glad to be able to do this without first considering whether the object thereof was wanting in his or her duties to God. Kitty was jealous of both these last gifts from the author of her being, and her gratitude to Him was accordingly chilled.

"And it is He," her mother went on, "who has given you life and health and strength. Just think if you had been born a cripple or blind, so that you could not play and run about and look at the flowers and the grass and the fields" (they lived in Chiswick in those days), "or a picture-book, or see your dolls. How dreadful that would have been! But He has not done that. He has given you eyes to see and ears to hear and a

tongue to speak. But He wants you to use all these gifts which He has given you to His honour. I want you to try and remember this—never to look at the beautiful trees and flowers, never to begin a game without saying ‘Thank God, who has given me these good things.’ Will you promise me to remember this, Kitty?”

“Yes, mother,” answered Kitty, not realising what an impossible thing had been required of her, a child of seven or eight.

Mrs. Maynard realised no whit more the monstrosity of her demand. Her whole mind had of late become permeated with a sense of the existence and in a degree also with a consciousness of the love of God. She had forgotten that she had not always felt like this: it seemed to her as natural as eating to have these things constantly in her thoughts.

Only it must be admitted that even she, without knowing it, played a trick upon her reason and her conscience. She believed her mind utterly possessed by the thought of her Creator’s goodness. In reality she thought of Him much as the Greeks thought of Fate, not as a wicked or malicious Being, but as one utterly outside the laws of human morality. There was, however, in Mrs. Maynard’s theology another Being, called Jesus, also a God no doubt; but, as her secret conscience told her, quite different from, nay, essentially opposed in nature to the first God. He it was who stood between mankind and the blind vengeful Fate—vengeful by a law of necessity not by malice—whom she spoke of as God the Father. It was to Jesus, not to the Father, that mankind owed whatever good it possessed. For, though the material goods of the world must, as she spoke of them to Kitty, be reckoned to the score of God the Father, they were to be counted mean things of themselves; and they were, moreover, utterly outweighed by the prospect of the punishment which had been reserved for all in a future state. The possibility of rescue from this awful destiny mankind owed solely to the second divinity, Jesus; and it was He in reality who was so continually in Mrs. Maynard’s thoughts.

Wherefore it was that in trying to instil into Kitty “the love of God” without telling her that there were two Gods, she was, as has been said, playing a trick upon her own reason and conscience, and she was sealing the doom of any profit which might have come from her exhortations.

Kitty honestly tried to carry out the duty which had been

laid upon her. A less original child would have forgotten it straight away, or would have murmured for a day or two a perfunctory "Thank God" and supposed that she was doing all that was required. But with Kitty these exhortations did not run off the mind like water off a water-wheel. She was at this time near the close of her eighth year, and was beginning to have what her mother would have called a "living" consciousness or conviction of the existence of a Being somewhere up above her.

Henry, who was her younger by eighteen months, once took her into confidence upon the subject.

"Do you think, Kitty, that there *weally* is a Jesus-God up there that mummy *tawks* about so?" he whispered to her once, as Kitty, Henry, and Nancy were kneeling side by side and their mother had been called away for a minute.

"Yes, I do," said Kitty.

"Then let us *ask* him for what we *weally* want," said Henry, "as mummy isn't here, and not say all that about making us good girls and boys and loving His name, you know."

"Yes. Let's," said Kitty. "I want to have a box of paints to paint like papa and . . ."

And Henry at the same time began—

"Please, Jesus-God, give me a weal sawword next birthday and make Coally's little kits well and . . ."

"Oh, Harry, you mustn't say 'Jesus-God'! Mummy never does," said Annie.

"Yes, she does," said Henry.

"No, you must say 'Lawword Jesus,' " replied Annie, giving a perfectly unconscious caricature of her mother's pronunciation.

At this moment Mrs. Maynard returned.

"What are you doing, Henry and Nancy? Are you talking to each other when you ought to be praying to God?" she said. "Let me hear you say your prayers properly."

Before long this religion began to weigh heavily upon Kitty. If there had been anyone to help her to distinguish between the two Gods it would have been different. For a time her heart went out in affection to the second divinity, whose form and face as pictured on a window in church evoked all her instinct for romance. And yet He and that capricious and unjust Father in heaven lived on the closest terms of intimacy and friendship. It was all very puzzling. Gradually she arrived at a creed that was the logical outcome of her mother's—that all good things came from Lord Jesus and all

bad things from God. (She didn't believe really that Jesus liked God.) Three years later—when she was about eleven—this final outcome of her ponderings found expression.

"How I hate God!" she said one day in the midst of their play and quite simply.

But Lilly, who was now five years old, carried this awful sentiment to their mother. It was a marked day in Kitty's life.

Mrs. Maynard was a woman of strong feeling but not of strong individual preferences. Her heart was generally absorbed by the baby for the time being. Kitty, who had had the fever of passionate love for her mother more strongly than any of the others, had more than they been passionately jealous of any favours shown to her younger brothers and sisters. Indeed, without knowing it she had gone through precisely the same experience as her father; for Henry Maynard too for a period had been deeply in love with his wife and as deeply jealous of his earlier children.

To Kitty there came a day when she realised that she was being turned into a mere slave to the baby of the household. She sank into a mood of sullen resentfulness which her mother took for a proof of her unconverted condition. (Lilly, at the time this story begins, the next surviving child, was the most converted of all the flock—if there is a comparative term in these things.) For a while Kitty had had a certain consolation in the brother and sister who came next to her—Henry and Nancy. But four years ago these had been carried off with diphtheria. This terrible event happened not very long after the awful blasphemy of Kitty's had been reported to her mother. Kitty herself believed and trembled at the power and vengeance of her Father in heaven. That Harry and Nancy had not died in such a full odour of sanctity as Mrs. Maynard wished the mother in her deepest heart attributed to Kitty's evil influence. She never said so much even to herself; never admitted in fact that Henry and Nancy had not died as completely in the arms of Jesus as she could have wished. But the feeling lay smouldering within her, and made a wide breach between her and her eldest child.

What evil fate was it then that Kitty, whose heart was by nature full of tenderness, should be shut out from affection more than the rest of the family? The fate, one can only answer, lay in herself, as all our fates do—though they are not the less hard for that—more especially in that originality of

character which made her take things more seriously than other children did, which made her mother's creed for a time more of a vital thing to her and made her detect more readily its fatal inconsistency.

It was after the death of his two little children that Maynard began to take more notice of Kitty. But this was not until his passion for his wife had been quite worn out and had been altogether absorbed in his artistic yearnings. Maynard and his eldest daughter were too much alike. They had, moreover, gone through too much of the same experience, only that Kitty had not found an art to compensate her for slighted or cooling love. Her father divined that Kitty was in a sense forlorn and abandoned among her brothers and sisters. He would have made it up to her if he could. But, along with his natural kindness, Maynard had that dislike of unnecessary emotion and that irritability of nerves—giving even a possibility of actual cruelty—which belong to the artistic temperament. The same nervous tension, which made him in moments of mental excitement delight in crunching sugar between his teeth or snapping twigs in his fingers, made it sometimes impossible for him to desist from teasing and plaguing Kitty, whose unconverted nature only became more unconverted under such treatment. And then there were times when the mental strain of the artist found other means of relieving itself more fatal than the munching of sugar or the snapping of twigs.

As for Maynard himself, whatever other drawbacks there had been to his happiness, there had come not long since a wonderful moment in his life—the moment when the hard struggle for bread which had gone on for years and years showed signs of ending at last in victory. The final victory had come two years or so ago. It seemed to Maynard to give him all he had ever asked for. To be able to work at the work he felt he could do best, to know that by that work he could keep his household out of want; to have triumphantly given the lie to all the gloomy prophecies of old Mouchester—though now Mouchester was gathered to his fathers—prophecies which had been dumbly reflected in the sad looks of his mother and sisters; was there anything else that he could ask for? Life was a wondrous power, the world was one great harvest of beauty, there were endless years before him to reap in that harvest and no fear of ever coming to an end. Those were days when he walked upon the air.

He thought little then of the judgment of the world at large, not much even of the opinion of his fellow-artists. He had found a dealer who believed in him to the extent of—sums that a few years later were reckoned downright robbery. He was too well contented with himself and with his work to feel emulous or envious of any living reputation. He tasted still in its fulness the physical pleasures of his art; the mere handling of brush and palette-knife, the soft yielding touch of the paint, were sweet to him in those days as the caress of gentle lips. And the imaginative joys, now that for the first time he was complete master of his imagination, were without end. As a refuge against fits of reaction he had the unfailing stimulus of the wine-cup—say rather the whiskey-bottle. He taxed its resources more and more, but in these years they always answered to his calls.

Then as Maynard grew in reputation he brushed more against his brother artists. He heard more of the history of art all over the world. Ideas it seemed that he thought had struck no one but himself were being put in practice over the water in Paris. Once an English critic more knowing and not less mistaken than most of his order spoke of Maynard as one of the few Englishmen who had drunk in the influence of the rising French *plein-air* school. With all this new knowledge, with a new sense of emulation that entered when the thought of fame or reputation began to drive out the pressing concern for daily bread, new and unimagined despairs would sweep over Maynard at his work. Every true artist has these fits of despondency, but to Maynard after he had achieved his first successes they began to increase, not to diminish.

It was one day of January. How wretched he had felt that morning when he went to his club!—a sudden access of despair and horror of his work the like of which had never come upon him before. He had thrown down his brushes—he was at work upon “The Cider Makers” then—and rushed off to the Hamborough.

Ha-ha-ha! That man who tumbled over his dog by the park railings. “It was rich!” What had been the matter with him? What had made him just now feel so miserable, and think that all his powers were gone? Had he really ever thought that? Why on earth? It was all a mistake. He was getting on splendidly, splendidly. And the sight of that man who tumbled down—by Jove, that was amusing. He chuckled in

the cab, and was chuckling still as he found himself, he scarcely knew how, at the door of his studio once more. That man had been an immense help to him. He would paint that sort of thing for a change. Ha-ha! It was laughable that he should have been in despair about his genius. Why, hadn't the sight of a man tumbling over a dog set such a cloud of ideas floating through his mind that he couldn't disentangle them? Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! By Jingo, it was rich; it was excellent; really excellent. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Finding the long wicker deck-chair close to his feet, he threw himself into it and laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

But, hang it! He wanted to be alone. To think of all the new field of painting which was opened out to him by the man who tumbled over the dog. Who was there looking at him? What the hell did Kitty mean by being in the studio without leave? (Had he said that to himself or out loud?) Anyhow, it was an insult to look at any one in that frightened, staring way, as if they were mad. Kitty was a damned sight too inquisitive.

"What do you mean," he roared out, "by staring at me like that? What do you mean, I say. Come here." (He was surprised by the loudness of his own voice.)

But Kitty did not come forward. She only turned pale, and her eyes dilated the more. What was the meaning of it? Was her father going mad? She had heard of such a thing, but had never made any mental picture of what a mad person might be like. It was as if, awaking from a nightmare and expecting that all its terrors would fade as quickly as they had come, one were to find that they would not fade; that one had, in fact, stepped out of the region of life into the region of evil dreams. It was impossible to believe that that face, distorted with anger, those wild eyes, were really her father's. Was she awake or asleep?

In a moment the blood rushed to Maynard's head. He took up a paint-box. Was he positively going to throw it at her? He could hardly believe so himself. His hand seemed to act of its own accord.

Kitty did not wait to see. She turned and fled. The blood rushed back from Maynard's brain, and he became himself again. What a fool he had nearly made of himself! But it was all Kitty's fault; she had no business to be there. "Leave the room!" he called out. Then he saw that she was already gone.

A little later and the scene which had just passed had almost faded from Maynard's memory. He had taken a drop too much, certainly. As to how he had acted, how far Kitty had noticed him, he was not clear. Probably he had imagined that look of terror on her face. Besides, she knew that his temper was a little hasty. Soon the whole thing had almost utterly passed out of his mind. Only now and again in the days which followed, when he saw his daughter's eyes fixed upon him in a curious scrutinising way, his anger was inclined to rise. He restrained himself, however. He asked no questions, nor made the slightest allusion to this *contre-temps*.

But to Kitty it formed the third great epoch of her life. The first was that fateful exclamation in the garden, the second the deaths in the same week of Henry and Nancy. No sooner had she been carried somewhat out of the old household life and its routine than the new life which she was brought into became half fantastic-terrible with the recollection of the one dreadful scene always haunting her.

It is not to be supposed that her mother approved of the partial withdrawal of Kitty from her influence. Her husband was of "the world." Mrs. Maynard's disapproval of all that was of the world was so sweeping and general that her mind never stayed to fasten upon particular dangers which another mother might have thought of, such as the possible young men of Bohemian tendencies whom the child might encounter in her father's studio. Kitty did see one or two young men—Henderson of the snub nose and Shadwell of the straggly beard, for example, of whom we have already spoken. And, one and all, these young men treated the beautiful child and thought of her with that chivalrous shyness which flourishes better in Bohemia than in any other quarter of the globe. Figuratively, it may be said that a thousand swords would have leapt from their scabbards to avenge a look which threatened her with insult.

More power for good or evil lay in the miscellaneous reading to which Kitty now found access. Whatsoever in former times Mrs. Maynard had dismissed from the house as "unsuitable" or "silly"—words which have a special reference to all descriptions of the tender passion—found its way sooner or later to the studio. There accordingly Kitty discovered and devoured a great deal of varied literature which would otherwise have been denied her. She cared chiefly for poetry, and among the

poets she hovered between Scott and Byron. Sometimes her heroes were knightly and romantic, like James V., and sometimes they were dark-eyed and fierce, like the Corsair. She even read "Manfred," without ever finding out what it was about. And she read "Childe Harold," and had her head stuffed with odds and ends of description which seemed to her the most wonderful in the world.

Then new wonders opened for her when her father took her abroad for the first time. It was almost his first time of going abroad too, so that he kept very close to prescribed routes and trusted much to interpreters. One unavowed object of Maynard's was to utterly efface the remembrance of that studio scene eight months earlier. He partly succeeded. But Kitty never felt quite at home with him, and she romanced in silence. Their tour was planned only for a month. But everything she saw was a wonder—

"The castled crag of Drachenfels
Looks on the wide and winding Rhine,"

Kitty quoted to herself, though they went nowhere near Drachenfels. The quotation with her referred to the Three Kings at Basle and the bridge under which flows the swift but infant river.

At any rate, they did see

"The Alps,
The palaces of Nature, whose vast walls
Have pinnaced in clouds their snowy scalps,
And throned eternity in icy halls
Of cold sublimity, where forms and falls
The Avalanche, the thunderbolt of snow.
All that expands the spirit, yet appals,
Gather around these summits, as to show
How Earth may pierce to Heaven, yet leave vain man below."

And it was the same always. In virtue of her very silence and *recullement*, Kitty beheld twice as many marvels as were to be found in reality. Every hawk she saw was an eagle, and half the goats were chamois.

Then came one evening at the *Hotel de l'Ours* (*Gasthof zum Büre*) at Ober Schellinggen. Better than any of the inns at which she had stayed Kitty remembered this one—the maid in Swiss costume, the flabby waiter in dusty black, the long low *salle-à-manger* (*Speisesaal*), the two long tables; one of these only was half full, for it was late in the season. Kitty

remembered the entrance of the slight dark young man in Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers who came in after they had finished their soup. The next thing which she very distinctly remembered was the view from her bedroom window—after that evening meal—over the dark valley, with its pine woods. What wonderful valleys these Swiss valleys were!—descending to unimagined depths. Straight opposite, and, as it seemed, almost on a level with her eyes, Kitty looked upon the glacier—the Eberstein glacier—on which the moon was shining. She had always expected the moon shining on a glacier to send up a thousand sparkling reflections, bright as diamonds. But this glacier looked more like a great tract of waste ground. On the other hand, an unspeakable mystery hung about the peaks, which towered above it, and melted almost into the thinness of dreams; between them here and there great lakes of white cloud lay couched.

And high as she could look above, still further down to her imagination descended the black depths below. It seemed awful to cast one's eyes down towards those hollow distances. Still more awful must it be for those upon the terrace under her window. They were poised right above the chasm. Kitty delighted in conjuring up these fancied terrors. And then she looked upon the two figures on the terrace, her father and the young Englishman (the same who had come in late to *table-d'hôte*), who were quietly talking as they smoked. There was an untold sense of security in the sight. She liked to listen to the murmur of their voices, in which she could distinguish no words. And then, again, she withdrew her attention from them and gave it to the sounds of the night. The sweet, faint hum of a cascade was continually in her ears; from time to time the pine-trees round the inn sent forth their sea-like murmur. Oh, wonder upon wonder! Oh, infinite world! “Buzz-buzz” the talk of the two men went on below.

Next morning Kitty Maynard was introduced by her father to the new arrival, Mr. Vanlennert; and she found, with a thrill of excitement which was half painful, that he was to accompany them for a long morning's walk, the chief excursion of the place, down to Unter Schellingen, thence up the Ebersbach valley and on to the glacier at which she had looked last night. The wonder and mystery of the previous night's scene had gone from the morning vision, and the poetry had gone from Kitty's thoughts. She was absorbed in speculating what the new acquaintance was like, still more what he thought of

her. The interest she took in these questions was too intense to be pleasant. But she felt that a new world was somehow opening before her, into which she looked with alternate thrills of dread and hope. Once, when Bertie gave her his hand to help her across a brook, she felt that new world very near indeed. She scarcely looked often enough at their new friend to have a clear idea of his features, but she thought there was something wonderfully attractive in his manner, in his dark eyes, his light figure, in his great good nature, and in his pleasant, well-bred voice.

Next followed her sudden slip, and Kitty hung for a moment between life and death. She did not realise her danger while it was present. But the next day, still more in the watches of the night, it all came back to her. In those dreams of hers the past danger became a future one, advancing like some ineluctable fate. Almost every night for a week and more Kitty awoke from such terror bathed in sweat. The pain of her ankle enfevered her dreams, and the nervous fever into which she fell retarded the recovery from her sprain.

Mr. Vanlennert was very kind. He delayed his departure from Ober Schellingen to help to amuse the patient. He brought her flowers and stones that he picked up in his walks, and read to her as she lay on a couch upon the terrace. Of course, all the tourists were more or less in love with the beautiful suffering child; notably the fatter of the two young Germans, the one with a large schlüger-cut across his forehead, and the two Americans, a man and wife, Harbottle by name, who arrived while Kitty lay unable to walk. But Bertie was the only Englishman of the party, and he generally passed for a relation, so intimate did they become.

Among the half-dozen stray Tauchnitzes which formed the inn library was a Keats, and Mr. Vanlennert's readings out loud from this poet were the beginning of a change of Kitty's taste in poetry; not, it must be said, that Bertie in reality read particularly well, for Keats was almost as new to him as it was to his auditor.

“Nor do we only feel these essences
For one short hour. No, even as the trees
That whisper round a temple become soon
Dear as the temple's self, so does the moon,
The passion poesy, glories infinite,
Haunt us till they become a cheering light
Unto our souls. . . .”

After the stranger was gone, she could in fancy hear his voice still reading, and it seemed as if the firs which murmured about their little inn had become trees more sacred than they were before. And when Kitty recovered and could walk again a little stiffly, and all the fever had left her—it was nearly a month before this had been effected—she had, in the first place, grown visibly in height, and, in the second, she had grown still more extraordinarily in age, for she had passed the moral barrier which stands between childhood and womanhood. Now, when she now and again in dreams went through the history of her accident, after the terror came the sense of rescue, of safety. She felt again Bertie's strong arms round her and hers about his neck. The image of the man, the lover, took its permanent place in Kitty's thoughts. Though it was a poetic dream rather than a reality, the image came in the noblest guise it can take—as the strong support to her weakness, the rescuer, the protector: as if a shadow from the wing of destiny were giving her warning that she would one day stand much in need of protection and support.

CHAPTER IX.

HERBERT VANLENNERT became during the first two months of his life in London a pretty frequent visitor at Maynard's studio. And as he often met Ned Bertram there, he got to know him likewise, and went to see him in his chambers in the Middle Temple.

Bertram, who went rarely into society of the evening-dress kind, had a largish circle of acquaintance of a certain sort. He was something like a father-confessor to a number of young aspirants in literature of both sexes. The society of which he got a glimpse at Bertram's was all very novel to Vanlennert. He, too, before long, began to feel the same attraction toward the father-confessor nature of the elder man and put him *au courant* with the actual condition of his worldly affairs as far as he knew them.

"The bar!" said Bertram in amazement. "You expect to make money at the bar."

"Yes. Why shouldn't I?" said the younger man, rather nettled.

"But you don't know anything about it?"

"Well, of course not at present. I'm learning. I'm in Doderidge's Chambers. I rather like . . ."

"Oh, but my dear friend. That's no use. You've got to be called, and then what shall you do? You've not a chance of getting any work."

"Why not? Why, there's a chap I knew at Eton. He was in Lower Division. He didn't sap much there either, and wasn't anything much. I was told the other day that he was making a lot. . . ."

Bertram considered his guest for a moment. After all, there was no use in depressing him. And those alert-looking little chaps (the exact converse of Bertram's self) often had strange strokes of luck and got on one could not tell how. "But what are you going to do meanwhile? Go in for literature—journalism?"

"Oh, I couldn't do that." Bertie blushed. *That* seemed to him to stand on quite a different plane from legal successes. Though of course it was an idea that he had secretly cherished.

"Of course it's great humbug most of it now-a-days. But as the French say, *c'est un moyen comme un autre*."

"But I don't know how to begin."

"Ask Bradshaw to dinner," said Bertram, smiling sardonically. "You've met him here, haven't you?"

"Would he come?"

"Wouldn't he! No; perhaps he wouldn't. He goes out a good deal. You'd better begin with Lawes, the sub-editor."

"Will you come if I do?"

"I'd rather not, if you don't mind. I keep my evenings for work as much as I can. Maynard will, I have no doubt. It's just the opposite way with him. . . . I expect either Bradshaw or Lawes will be in to lunch to-day, or both. You'll stop, won't you?"

It was Saturday. Bertram's only form of entertainment was to have a rather more extensive and expensive luncheon going in his chambers on that day. And there a larger or smaller party used to congregate. Bradshaw, the editor of the *Piccadilly Review*, often came. And wheresoever the editors are, there will the young eagles of literature be gathered together.

"Would you like to wash your hands?" Bertram opened the door into his bedroom.

When Bertie Vanlennert returned, he found a young lady, with bright eyes and a muddy complexion, standing in the room

and talking eagerly. Her slim figure and smooth cheek gave her an almost girlish appearance, especially in profile. But this was somewhat contradicted in full view by the haggardness of her eyes and by some unpleasant lines about the mouth. She was leaning on the mantelpiece, and her eyes glittered in the firelight.

"Well, if you'll take my advice you will give up Hugo Pemberton and his theories," Bertram was just saying. "Oh, Vanlennert, let me introduce you to Miss Fisher. You know her novels, of course."

Vanlennert did not know them. But he did not say so. Miss Fisher gave him her hand at once with a curious spasmodic shake. She then turned back at once to answer Bertram.

"Why should I give up Hugo Pemberton's theories?" she said, eagerly, pushing back her dishevelled hair with a pleasant, half-girlish motion. "Why shouldn't I try and give . . ."

"Because they're all bosh," said Bertram, smiling down at her. He had both hands thrust into his trousers' pockets.

An angry spot appeared in each of Violet Fisher's dusky cheeks. If that sibyl was capable of mortal love Hugo Pemberton was the object of it. "Of course you say they are bosh just because you disagree with them. . . ." Her lip curled in scorn.

"Well I should not say they were bosh if I agreed with them, certainly," said Bertram, with provoking good nature.

Violet Fisher's breath came short. But at this moment the laundress entered bearing dishes. She was immediately followed by one or two other guests.

Miss Fisher was the only lady of the party. This did not seem to astonish any of the others, except Vanlennert, nor to cause the least embarrassment to Miss Fisher herself. The men present treated her *sans gêne*, as if she had been one of themselves; but never in the least rudely.

"Perhaps you had better help yourself," said Bradshaw, the editor, finding it difficult to hold a dish for her. "Heaven helps those who help themselves, you know. And you've such a firm reliance upon Providence."

Miss Fisher smiled a trifle sourly. "I had to send to a publisher's in a hurry yesterday," she said, "and nobody could go but the son of the housekeeper at our flats. He took three hours going to Paternoster Row and back. It's about three miles both ways. The old lady came up in despair. 'Well,

miss, I never knew anything like that boy. You might as well trust in Providence as trust in 'im.' "

Bradshaw laughed.

"Do you mean that that little beast Shelton has got a poem in it?" a man, whose name Bertie had not caught, was saying to Rosefield, the art critic and playwright.

"Who's the man you call a little beast?" said Bradshaw.

"Oh, Shelton; the most awful creature. He makes little ballads and sets them to music and sings them at evening parties. And ladies—the sort of ladies who say those things—side up to you and say, 'I was in hopes Mr. Shelton would have been here and sung us one of his charming little ballads.' "

"It's a perfectly honourable occupation to sing ballads at parties," said Bertram. "That's precisely what Homer did."

"Yes. Only somehow it doesn't seem to suit our present civilisation so well," Bradshaw said.

But Miss Fisher and Rosefield had gone off upon the delinquencies of the new editor of the *Experiential Review*.

"He's most awfully afraid of the prudes and the godamites," Violet Fisher was saying.

"Isn't he?" put in the unknown. "He sent back a little story I sent him the other day—not the least bit on its merits only . . ."

"No, I should imagine rather on its demerits," put in Bradshaw.

"In fact," went on the other, as if he had never heard this last remark, "there never was such a choice of an editor since Bradshaw was chosen to edit the *Piccadilly*, and that I grant you is enough to whip creation."

"Oh," said Rosefield, "I've always thought it's the simplest thing possible why they made Bradshaw the editor of the *Piccadilly*."

"Why? I should like to know."

"Because the editor does not contribute."

Most of the guests laughed. Miss Fisher did not. Herbert out of politeness only smiled.

"Well, I would not stand that if I were you," said Bertram to the editor.

"Oh, we don't mind Rosefield. He's our *enfant gâté*. *L'enfant gâté, l'homme raté*."

"Exactly," replied Rosefield, "me and you."

"One would not have minded any other review," Miss Fisher said, still continuing the old theme, turning now to Bertie; "but

when you think what the *Experiential* has done in former days in destroying superstitions. . . ."

"It rather depends what you mean by superstitions," said Bertie, with a little colour in his cheeks.

"I thought all straight thinkers were pretty well agreed on that point," said Miss Fisher, loftily.

Bertie politely tried to think of some subject which would give a pleasurable turn to the conversation.

"Do you know Maynard?" he began, in default of anything else.

"Himself? no. I know his pictures. But I don't care for them—much," she added, remembering that he was a great friend of Bertram's.

Rosefield had caught the name.

"I went to your friend Maynard's studio," he said to Bertram, "with Charlie Cumming. He's got some very good things. But I honestly confess I don't care for that sort of subject picture. He's got a sort of *pendant* to 'The Cider Makers,' " he explained to Bradshaw.

"No. I didn't care very much for 'The Cider Makers' either. Of course one could see it was very well painted."

"That has a good deal to do with the merits of a picture," said Bertram.

"Oh, there's no doubt Maynard's an excellent colourist. . . ."

"He's so prosaic," said Miss Fisher, remembering the slight Bertram had put on Hugo Pemberton. "Don't you think so?" she said to Bertie.

"Well, no. It didn't strike me. . . . At first, perhaps there doesn't seem to be anything in the picture that you couldn't see for yourself, but . . ."

"After all," said Miss Fisher, "we've only one English painter, and that's Burne Jones."

"Oh, draw it mild," said the late unknown, whom Bertie had just heard Bradshaw call Clayton.

"Tush! There's no such person as Burne Jones. He's a myth which means the marriage of the early Italian and the Hellenic art," said Rosefield. "Burne is another name for Helios or Apollo, and . . ."

"Jones a corruption from *Jupiter tonans*—a welding, a syncope, as the grammarians say," put in Bradshaw.

"No, Jones is John the Baptist, the Christian form of Helios or Apollo," said Rosefield.

"Why not J. C.?" said Miss Fisher, smiling.

"There's no doubt Burne Jones and all of them are what the Americans call 'old hat,'" said Clayton.

"So I suppose you might say that Beauty itself was 'old hat,'" answered Miss Fisher. "That is what some people seem to think now-a-days. We've had enough of beauty, let's go in for hideousness."

"Yes, I was reading a paper by a German very much to that effect the other day," said Bertram.

"Yes. I agree with Miss Fisher," said Bradshaw, in a somewhat patronizing tone. "Half this talk about truth in art and so on is only a worship of unsightliness, and a mean kind of envy of people who, like the great artists of the past, could produce beautiful things."

Presently Miss Fisher departed. Bradshaw to enjoy his one afternoon's freedom settled himself down for a smoke. Bertram gave Vanlennert a sign to stay, and thus he was brought into a closer relationship with the great man than he had been in before. But the conversation which went on now was quite above his head.

"Did you get that new book of Von Straubmann's?" the editor said.

"Yes. I've only looked into it a little yet. There are some good things in it. I imagine the philology is very shaky."

"Oh, is it? I remember old Sandford used to think a lot of Von Straubmann. He used to recommend it to us when we were reading for Greats."

"Ah, yes. He was very much the go then. But all that idea about the Primitive Aryan speech has been given up now, by the best people."

"Has it? I fancy Max Müller sticks to it, doesn't he?"

"Does he? If he does, I'm pretty sure he's wrong all the same."

"Oh, well, if Max Müller goes in for a thing it's safe enough for me," said Bradshaw, who had the foible of omniscience. It was a foible which Bertram almost alone of his friends never respected, and he esteemed Bertram's judgment the more highly in consequence.

Then Vanlennert went.

"Could you give that boy anything?" said Bertram. "He wants to try his hand at literature."

"What can he do?"

"Oh, I don't suppose anything special. But if you had anything knocking about . . ."

"I'll find him something or other if you wish it," said the editor.

Thus in a moment was made a decision which Bertie would have imagined the most momentous possible.

CHAPTER X.

ONE morning in the middle of March Vanlennert awoke to find that his lodgings in St. James's Place had undergone, during the night, a total transformation.

His bedroom window looked down upon a yard, beyond which ran another at right angles; then came a piece of dusty garden, into which jutted a large conservatory. These things Bertie had looked upon fifty times. But on this particular morning they were all changed. How delightfully friendly and familiar the yard looked! Tommy blacking boots on a bench straight below him was the most cheering object imaginable. How hard he worked! What a world of splendid activity there was in this London, each one going his own way, but every one with something to do and all enjoying themselves—down to the very sparrows, who were fluttering about an empty clothes-line and the top of the wall! Some painters had been set to work upon the more distant conservatory. He could just see the head of one, and his hand appearing and disappearing at regular intervals; and now that he opened his window he could hear the man singing, in what may be called a recitative manner, something about "It's awful jolly, that you know." The sight of that painting on the conservatory gave Bertie an especially keen thrill of pleasure.

It was the same when he came into his sitting-room. Here he commanded only the view of a high house of blackened stucco, the exact counterpart of the house in which Bertie lived. Vanlennert had by this time learnt from his landlord O'Brien the names and something of the histories of the lodgers opposite.

A faint gleam of sunshine was stealing into one corner of the room. It was all that was needed to give an air of inexpressible cheerfulness to the place at the moment that Bertie came

in to have his breakfast. The ray lighted upon that hunting picture called "A Rasper," one of a set of six. There had been times when Herbert Vanlennert was unpleasantly conscious of the impossible anatomy of the horses and hounds in the hunting pictures. At this moment, as his eye lighted upon "A Rasper" and its nearest companion, "Gone to Ground," they seemed just what were wanted in this place. They bore with them a fragrance of the inn parlors where of winter afternoons, as dusk was drawing in, he had rested after a day's hunting to drink a glass of hot toddy while his horse was getting a draught of meal and water. The family portraits at Netley or the Pousins in the drawing-room had never, since he was quite a child, given him more pleasure than these pictures did now. At this point Bertie thought, with a deliciously painful tightening of the heart, how impossible it was for him to wish he had never had to leave Netley. For in that case Netley would never have been let to its present *Tennants*, and he should never have seen . . . And thus it was that, after each short flight, his thoughts returned to nestle in the same theme that had been their first on waking—that that day, the 21st of March, had been fixed upon for the return of Sir William Tennant's family to London.

Delightful was it to think of old Ralph Kynnersley, who had just come to the window of the first floor opposite. In the dim background was his man putting the finishing touches to the breakfast-table. Though, through the death of a nephew within the last two years, he had inherited a large property in the north, old Ralph never could be induced to spend more than three months a year away from the lodgings he had inhabited and the club he had frequented for more than a quarter of a century. Was not this a history to move to something like a passionate attachment to St. James's Place and its precincts? not less so to the boy who was coming down the place calling "papers," or the negro crossing-sweep in faded "pink" at the corner. . . .

"I hope you found the cutlets satisfactory," said O'Brien, in his best manner (he had been butler to Lord Carrickshannon), as he met Bertie in the hall preparing to go out. "Mrs. O'Brien was rather afraid they . . ."

"Oh, excellent, thanks!"

"I *thank* you, sir," and the landlord opened the door for his lodger to pass through.

"There's something marvellously exhilarating in the air of

March in London," Herbert thought, as he came out into the street. The sunlight had faded now, and a few stray flakes of snow were drifting about in the dry air. They were not unpleasant at all; quite the contrary. "How delightfully busy every one looks! Soon I shall be in the swing of it all, too. It will be jolly earning my own livelihood for the next few years, till the Netley affairs are settled. I shall be as busy as anybody, practising at the bar, and perhaps—who knows?—writing articles, or books even, as well." His fancy did not strike wing even at such a daring flight. "Yes, books, too, perhaps, as well," he said, and continued his walk to Doderidge's chambers. There he and three or four other pupils were being initiated into the mysteries of law. He saw those books. The titles were not very distinct. But they all had "By H. R. C. Vanlennert" very distinctly on their backs. And Somebody was looking at them.

Old Dodge was out. The pupils were engaged when Herbert entered in fixing strings to a piece of carpet that one of them had discovered in a cupboard. It was a long strip, nearly as long as the room.

"Ah, Vanlennert, you're just in time to lend a hand!" said Alleyne.

"What are going to do?"

"You'll see."

"But I don't see," said Spofforth, "how we are to get the string from one window into the other."

"Oh, that's easy enough," answered the one who had spoken first. "Look here. Give me something with a hole in it. That pair of scissors will do." And he tied the loose end of one string on to the scissors. "Now open the windows . . . By Jove, it is cold!" He let the weighted string hang down for a moment, then swung it like a pendulum till it swung high enough to enter the other window. The first time it struck the bottom of the sill and rebounded; the second time it swung too high and broke a pane of glass. The third time he succeeded.

"Now haul away, Ricketts."

Ricketts pulled the string, and the carpet after it, till the latter hung suspended from each window, flat against the side of the house.

"What do you want me to do?" said Bertie, who stood behind.

"Oh, nothing. Now, are you ready? Lower!" And

Ricketts and Alleyne lowered the carpet till it almost covered up the windows of the chambers below ; and old Woolford, the Q.C., who was in the middle of a consultation, found his daylight suddenly turned to night.

But before he had time to see what was the matter the carpet was up again. . . .

"You take a turn now, Vanlennert. It freezes one's fingers off," cried Ricketts.

A clerk knocked at the door. "Mr. Doderidge is just coming up the stairs, gentlemen."

"What are we to do with the carpet?" said Bertie.

"Oh, drop it," answered Alleyne, and the carpet fell into the court below. "Hitchcock can fetch it up presently."

"Of course he can," said Vanlennert to himself. "What jolly fellows! What jolly fun! I ought to come here oftener. I'll ask Alleyne to dine with me to-night."

Then Mr. Doderidge came in. "Good-morning, gentlemen," he said. "Woolford stopped me on the stairs, and said you had been holding something in front of his windows and darkening the room. I wish you would have the kindness to remember that you are not schoolboys. Mr. Alleyne, have you drafted an opinion in Weldon and Hicks? If so, I'll look at it."

"Law's a very easy thing, after all. I shall soon twig it if I sap a bit," Bertie said to himself that afternoon, as he turned to walk home. . . . "This is a rum part of London ; but awfully interesting, especially just at dusk."

He was walking quickly, in time to his happy thoughts, and had constantly to change his pace and direction to thread in and out among the passengers, sometimes to step from the kerb on to the roadway in order to make his way among the throng. The majority were going in his direction. They were in high hats and low, and in dark great-coats. A sprinkling of respectable women were among them, these all in dark dresses, with or without jackets, and with boas round their necks. But there were a number also of women of the town, strolling singly and in couples, and most frequently with their faces turned eastward. They were distinguishable by their feathered hats, their black cotton-velvet jackets, or by jackets of imitation sealskin. They wore gilt bracelets and thick gilt chains, and tried to catch the eye of every passer-by. There were men too with thick lips and bottle-noses turning to

blue in the cold, loitering about, some with trays of penny wares or boxes of matches; they wore round their necks comforters of white-and-brown and red-and-black check, and their boots were cracked at the side. This was the population of the Strand. But if you did not look too close, it seemed a crowd of bustling activity and good spirits, and here and there, just off the road on a side-street, a chestnut-oven glowed brightly in the light, which was beginning to fade a little.

And now Bertie turned out of the Strand to pass through the Lowther Arcade. There some portion of a stall had been upset, and the crowd gathered round it brought him to a standstill. For the last ten minutes he had not noticed where he went, but walked mechanically. Now that he was stopped his mind was all confused. At that moment it was as if something broke in the mechanism of his thoughts, and, from no outward cause, their whole direction changed. Why, a moment ago, had he felt so confident that all was going right with him; that he should have no difficulty in earning money at the bar, in literature, somehow; that the Netley affairs would soon be put straight? Suppose they were not. Suppose practice did not come to him. Or suppose things only got settled when it was too late.

"Too late!" those awful words. For the first time they became a part of Bertie's consciousness. A horrible gnawing fear began to enter into possession of his mind in the place of the perfect confidence he had felt a few moments ago. It was a new experience in his life. Fear, too, came hand in hand with a new passion, jealousy. His imagination, building upon the scene of the last dinner at Netley, set to work to frame a picture of the life which Silvia would begin to lead now that they were back in town. They would start by the one-fifteen train probably, and would very likely be driving from the station towards Prince's Gate at this moment. Perhaps that very night somebody would be coming to dinner. Somebody—he could not see why, still he guessed it might be so—more favoured by the family than he was; at any rate, an older friend.

Still Silvia's heart was free, that was a comfort. He thought so, at least. But, after all, how little he knew of her life! This stay of theirs at Netley, which to him was a new epoch in the world's history—perhaps to her it was only an incident. She liked town life. And why? Who could really prefer London unless for one reason, the reason that made him prefer

hat day, even to the crisp leaves and crackling branches of own woods? Oh, yes, that must be it! Why had he never thought of this before? Sir Roper Smyth had alluded half a dozen of Silvia's admirers. If she did not see them day, she would be sure to see them to-morrow or the next day. If one were not already chosen, what chance had he in the whirl of town life? The memory of Crawford Tennant's silisk glance shot through him. Oh, my God! oh, my God! was too horrible to bear. Never in his life had he felt *fear* before—real dread. He could not give a name to this horrible pain and weakness which had come over him.

All these thoughts surged through Herbert Vanlennert's mind during the brief minute in which he passed up the dim arcade, not seeing what he passed. He had a vague notion that the keeper of the Arcade said something to stop him. But he went on. He emerged into the light again. He was in the same world that he had been in before, but not the same. A leakage there had been in his moral being, one of that kind that at all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot set right again. The scene upon which he looked remained ever afterwards memorable to him; the view of the church-yard lying, with the blank wall opposite to it and the wide pavement between. Numberless girls and boys were spinning their tops upon the pavement or clambering up the high railings orustering round a drinking-fountain near the church. A blind beggar was propped against the blank wall, making nets, with a rough terrier at his side. How terrible it was to see them there, with that awful doom hanging over everything! and Bertie glanced from side to side as if in expectation of some sudden blow. Something terrible was going to happen, he knew that; and, mistaking the revolution which was going on within him for a disturbance in the face of Nature herself, he looked this way and that for the signs of the approaching catastrophe.

A fat woman, with a spotted face, arm in arm with a girl in gaudy hat, of an unusually refined type, was walking down Melbaide Street towards the Strand.

"Sue's tumbled on a rare good thing," the woman was saying. "I knew she would if she took care of herself. I allays say to 'er that's what you've got to do. . . ." But seeing Bertie near, she lowered her voice.

It was the contrast between the woman's coarse, good-natured comely face and the concentrated sadness of the girl's that made

the tragedy of the picture. The latter's was a look, not so much of active misery as of unchangeable despair. She looked straight in front of her. Her mouth was a weak and sensitive mouth. The underlip was pushed forward as if in conscious protest against her own helplessness either from within or from without.

All this was seen in a flash. And on Bertie's excited hypersensitive mood it struck like the blow of a knife. A crowd of thoughts, sensations, half thoughts, half sensations, elbowed themselves through his brain. The gathering dusk, the bitter cold, the din, the infernal roar of the streets—all these were in it.

His depression, his despair of his own future, blazed up into a despair of the whole world—a passionate and hopeless pity for all who were desolate and oppressed: with this lingered unrecognised a certain disgust of all that was happy and comfortable and reputable. For a moment this feeling even affected his thoughts about Sylvia. Then with a rebound came a horror of himself that anything should even for a moment have been suffered to dim the beloved image. And amid all these which were mere germs of thought there went the strange sensation of having lived through the whole scene before—that parable of the Inevitableness of Fate—which comes to us all at times. Especially did it seem to Bertie that he had seen that girl's face before now. In reality it was only that her expression recalled in a manner that of Kitty as she was posing for her father the first time that Vanlennert had seen her again in London, when in fancy she stood like Ruth "in tears amid the alien corn."

CHAPTER XI.

HERBERT VANLENNERT called as soon as possible in Prince's Gate, at first unsuccessfully, for Lady Tennant had not set up any regular day as yet. The second time he was told that Mrs. Forster and Miss Tennant were in. He could have wished Mrs. Forster at the antipodes. But it was perhaps too much to hope to find Silvia alone.

The man-servant took him to the drawing-room door, threw it open, and then paused. Apparently there was no one in the room. But at the same moment voices came through the open

door from the inner drawing-room—Mrs. Forster's rather over-refined tones, then—confound it!—a man's voice that Bertie did not know. At this point Herbert, following in the wake of the man, caught sight of Silvia behind the tea-tray; and he can hardly be said to have seen distinctly anything more. Silvia sat, he thought, very square; she was in a grey dress with a grey velvet yoke, and a thick Indian silver chain falling over it. A little behind her to the left in a very low padded chair sat Gertrude leaning back, facing the door; and on the other side, the door-side, the end of a square-backed sofa came into view, on which very near the tea-tray sat a young red-haired gentleman. Worse and worse, there was Crawford at a larger table cutting a magazine.

Herbert shook hands with all the Tennants and was introduced to the red-haired young man. He was Percy Glenbyre, the nephew and heir presumptive to the Earl of Glowry, nephew, too, of Lady Anne Forster, and therefore cousin by marriage to Gertrude, whom he called by her Christian name. Bertie felt some satisfaction in the fact that he did not do the same to Silvia, and yet knew that he could give no rational reason for that satisfaction; for a cousinly familiarity is rather a barrier than an incentive to love.

Percy Glenbyre was much more than heir presumptive to a peerage, a position which in his case would have counted for very little either with Jews or chaperons; for Lord Glowry was a widower of only a little over fifty. What Percy was in addition was a late Balliol scholar, a fellow of All-Souls, a Lothian prizeman, a young man who had been in diplomacy for a year or two, who had travelled much, and who had now not long since been elected for a Scottish constituency. He was one of the rising hopes of the party to which he belonged. He spoke and, what is more rare for a diplomat, read in half a dozen languages. In talking to him Crawford Tennant's indifferent manner took on a shade of respect in place of the shade of insolence which it displayed towards the larger portion of his fellow-creatures. After the manner of young Radicals, Percy Glenbyre was very smartly dressed, and he wore an exotic in his button-hole. He spoke in rather a high-pitched voice with the suspicion of a Scottish accent in it, and when he talked with his eyeglass in his eye, the right corner of his mouth opened rather disagreeably, showing that his teeth were a good deal gone. This fact and the suspicion of crow's-feet about the eyes were the only things which seemed to contradict the youth-

fulness of his round whiskerless cheeks. His hair Bertie now saw was sandy rather than red ; his face was extensively freckled, and his cheeks were almost as round as a boy's ; he had a little red moustache over his straight mouth ; and his eyes were a light hazel approaching to yellow.

After he had shaken hands with Bertie he went on answering a question that Mrs. Forster had asked.

"You were talking about Marmstairs. . . . Yes, I go there every now and then. Of course I don't go scrambling about the hills and letting off guns. Old Lady Polly drives me about and we come in for the luncheon. I can't make out what you find in that sort of thing," he said, looking across to Crawford, and then to Bertie, who was thus brought within his line of vision, "Do you belong to the noble army of sportsmen?" he said, politely.

"Yes, I suppose so. Were you talking of deer-stalking? I've never done any of that," the other answered.

"I've the greatest respect for that sort of thing," Percy went on, dropping his eyeglass, but not otherwise paying much attention to the answer ; and then turning back to Gertrude and Silvia. "The forest next theirs has been taken by that old American chap," he said, "who is supposed to shoot a gillie every now and then if they don't produce game enough. I fancy he thinks the deer are a product of native industry."

"What a dreadful shame that is!" said the elder sister. Silvia, too, made an exclamation of disgust.

"I don't see that it's a shame particularly. I daresay the story about the gillie has been exaggerated, you know," Glenbyre said soothingly to his cousin.

"How silly you are, Percy ! I mean it's a shame those horrid people getting hold of all the picturesque forests and places."

"I don't know that they're horrid. Or if they are, it's better than being a bore. Don't you think so?" (This to Silvia, and then turning to her sister again.) "The duke's a bore, you must own that. As long as you have property in land one person's as much a right to it as another. . . ."

He kept up a constant flow of talk ; Crawford Tennant was absorbed in his magazine : it was impossible for any one else to get in a word. Bertie profited by the fact to change his place and get on the other side of Silvia, though he turned his back to her brother in doing so.

"Are you glad to be back in London?" he said.

"Oh, no—yes—I really don't know," she said a little shyly. It was the first time she had been the least shy before Bertie; and the change seemed to him to make her more adorable than ever. "Are you? But you've been here a long time, haven't you?"

"Since February—the end of January."

"That's a long time. They've had another meet at Netley since you left. Do you remember that time when you were so kind to Gertrude and me and lost all your hunting? I have never ceased to reproach myself for that. . . ."

"Reproach yourself! Why, I never—enjoyed anything more than that luncheon in Hatherley lane, don't you remember? . . ."

There was nothing very brilliant in this he felt. But perhaps his eyes said more for him than his tongue. Silvia showed a slight embarrassment.

"We wished you had been in Derbyshire last Thursday," she said. "Mr. and Mrs. Orcher came to dine with us. I'm always rather afraid of Mrs. Orcher, do you know?"

"Oh, are you? She's really one of the kindest . . ." Bertie began.

"Yes, so am I," said Gertrude. She was going to say, "Do you know Derbyshire, Percy?" to bring him into the conversation. He had been silent for a minute and fidgetty in consequence.

At this moment Crawford Tennant came between Silvia and Bertie without any apology. "Will you give me another cup of tea, please?" and he waited half a minute with his back turned to his guest; and at the same time Percy broke in at the name of Orcher.

"Orcher! Are those any relations of Charles Orcher in the Roman Embassy?"

"Yes: his mother," said Bertie, from whom Silvia was momentarily cut off. "Do you know him?"

"I met him in Rome this winter. I went there for a fortnight. Lord Selwood is my old chief. He used to be at St. Petersburg in those days, though. That's the way they do in diplomacy—send you for four or five years to St. Petersburg or Stockholm or some place like that, and then for another four or five years to Rome or Constantinople to thaw."

"How did you like St. Petersburg?" said Silvia, to whom Percy's remark was chiefly addressed.

"Just the best place in the world. Awfully friendly people

and not a bit stiff like the Germans. And then you know it's the only place where diplomacy can be the slightest use in the world. It's all bosh in Vienna and Rome, and at Madrid too; absolutely useless in Paris, where the Foreign Secretary probably runs a penny paper; and as long as old Bismark lives not the slightest account in Germany. But it's everything in Russia."

"What are the Russian girls like? Are they very beautiful?"

"Not beautiful. There are no *beautiful* women except in this country," he said, once more dropping his eyeglass politely.

"All the same, if I were to marry I think I should like to marry a princess," said Crawford, who had taken his teacup to the mantelpiece and stood looking down from there.

"*Née 'Igg of Manchestère*," put in Percy.

"But I suppose almost everybody's a prince in Russia, aren't they?" said Gertrude.

"Oh, rank's nothing in Russia; or rather, I mean, titles don't count there. It's all '*tchin*.'"

"What's '*tchin*'?" said Silvia, who, it has been said, thirsted for information.

"*Tchin*? Well, *tchin*'s rank, official rank, that is. It sounds like Chinese, don't it? 'You *tchin* me and I'll *tchin* you.' That's what they do in Russia, and everybody who isn't an official might as well be a serf as far as they are concerned. . . . They're a set of brutes," he added, remembering his political creed.

"But I thought there really was a good deal of liberalism in Russia—among the country gentry, I mean," said Bertie. "I was reading . . ."

"There's a good deal in Siberia," said Percy in his best manner, looking not at Bertie but at Crawford Tennant.

The next moment he felt disgusted with himself that he had launched so good a *mot* in so small a company. "Have you really been staying all the winter in the Midlands?" he went on to Silvia. "I call that heroic, especially of you, Gertrude. Frank's not going into Parliament, is he? . . . What have you done with the Villa Carniola?" It was to Silvia that he spoke again.

"Oh, we only took it for two winters on Gertrude's account."

"And now you're supposed to be hardened. Well, it would take a good deal to harden my heart against Mentone. Don't you think so?" he said to Bertie, not to leave him out.

"No, I don't," Bertie replied, bluntly. The words seemed to slip out of themselves.

Gertrude looked up surprised, and Percy passed his hand along the fringe of his moustache.

"We owe it to Mr. Vanlennert that we have got such a delightful place in Derbyshire," Gertrude explained.

"Ah?" answered Percy, not understanding.

"He has been kind enough to let it to us for a year or two—till you get married, I suppose," Gertrude said to Bertie.

Bertie blushed and involuntarily cast a look at Silvia.

"Oh, no! At least I am sure I don't want ever to turn you out—for you ever to go!" he said politely enough.

"Ah, well, I'm a heretic in these matters, I know," Percy broke in, taking up the thread of conversation where he had left it. "And after all I come back to England in February for no better purpose than helping to bait the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who shows very poor sport indeed. . . . I met some of our old friends at Cannes and Mentone," he went on to Silvia. "The Riversworths were there and the Johnes-Johneses" (a little smile hovered over his thin lips; and Silvia smiled back at this name), "and there were two new American beauties turned up before I came away. Claridge was awfully thick with them. By the way, the Churtons had gone, all but the invalid one."

"Poor Bella Churton, I'm afraid she's no better. . . . They must have thought you were not going to be there, Mr. Glenbyre."

Percy thrust forward his under jaw in a slight grin. "No; she's no better. She's the best of the lot, too," he said.

"Oh, Beatrice is very nice. Don't say anything against her; she's a great friend of mine."

"Not for worlds," said Percy, still grinning.

To Bertie sitting on one side, almost silent, Silvia seemed somehow to have changed during the last five minutes' talk. Her neck, her shoulders, her whole person seemed to have grown stiffer. He did not know then that that is the flirting attitude; but it made him feel out of it. Crawford, who had not spoken to him as yet except to say 'How do you do?' now asked him a few commonplace questions in an officially courteous manner. He saw that he was likely to get no more from that afternoon's call, and before long he rose to go. Gertrude shook hands quite kindly. Silvia cordially, with even a little pressure, which meant "Don't suppose that this Mr. Glenbyre is

my ideal man, even if you are not quite that." Crawford and Percy were just as polite as convention required, no more.

As Vanlennert left the room Percy Glenbyre eyed his departure attentively, not in the least rudely. Then he turned to Mrs. Forster.

"I don't quite catch on. Who is your young friend?" he said.

"He's our landlord," answered Crawford.

"Oh, up there at . . ."

"At Netley, yes," said Gertrude.

"I hope I didn't outrage his feelings by talking disparagingly of sport and its privileges. . . ."

"You are such a Radical, Percy. You think it's necessary to despise him because he is a landlord, and he's such a nice boy."

"Not the least. What an unkind thing to say! I'm not among those who place the young barbarian lower than the Christian cad." (Percy was still young enough—only about twenty-eight—to wish to pass for being older than he was.)

"At any rate not except in the abstract," said Crawford.

"What is the cad in the abstract? I haven't the least idea. The *caddus concretus*, forming with other *caddi* a constituency, is, I am bound to own, an object of some interest. But we've no cads in Scotland. They are a London production."

"You've caddies, at any rate," said Silvia: Percy smiled. But the next moment she felt that she had said such a silly thing that she blushed.

"You have landlords though, luckily for you," said Crawford, "or your occupation would be gone."

"Not in the least. When we've done with the landlords we shall begin with the plutocrats, who are said to be much worse. I am not sure that you would not come into that category."

"Perhaps, then, you'll tell me when it's safe to be a landlord again. Or tell my father. I believe he has some thoughts of buying Netley."

"But Mr. Vanlennert would *never* sell it," said Silvia, eagerly.

"I don't know. I rather fancy he wants to," said Crawford, with indifference. His words struck chilly upon Silvia Tennant.

Bertie left with the sense of exaltation which the sight of Silvia always gave him and still feeling in his fingers the light pressure of hers. It was not possible that that could mean

nothing ! It must be against the intention of Providence that these ecstatic feelings of his, this all-absorbing romantic devotion which now sprang up again in him like some deep subterranean stream when a well has been re-opened in it, it was not in nature that this should remain barren, mean nothing in the eternal scheme.

But how to prove his own superiority to all others, the superiority of his love, the superiority which he owed to his unswerving devotion ? If he could have fought with lance and sword. . . . But Bertie vaguely realised that the modern weapons were so different, were so hard to acquire the use of. A little sharpness, a little malice, a certain quickness of repartee : these might go far. If a man can succeed in making his rival look a fool for five minutes he has done much, may have gained almost every thing. Had he himself not been rather awkward, rather silent and stupid ? When he answered, " No, I don't," or something like that ? . . . What had made him speak in that way ? Almost as if he were a cad. Yes : here had gone the first turn in the lists, and how had he acquitted himself ? Oh, badly, badly ! there could be no doubt of that. He must not dwell upon that thought ! He would do better next time, not be taken unawares again. And after all he still felt the pressure of Silvia's fingers.

CHAPTER XII.

THROUGH the dark and slush of a wet April evening Herbert Vanlennert was driven up to the door of the Tennants' House in Prince's Gate. It was their first dance of the spring. A small knot of people was clustered on either side of the awning which led from the kerb-stone to the entrance, dusky, shabby figures, illuminated now and then by a flash of light through the opening door or by the lantern which the *commissionaire* at the edge of the pavement held in his hand. A carriage stopped the way for Bertie's cab ; the two brilliant figures which descended from it sending a gleam of bright-coloured plush and swansdown and golden hair and diamonds upon the sordid night might have been taken for angels paying a momentary visit to the lower world. The sight of the fair hair of the younger one gave Bertie an exquisite tightening of the heart-strings : it reminded him of Silvia. The gentleman of their party lingered

for a moment to give directions to the coachman. Then with much stamping and clatter the two large horses drew off the brougham, and Bertie's insignificant cab deposited him in his turn. Standing on the top of the steps, he paused for a moment and glanced absently round. He took in the black night, the swinging lantern, the squalid, hungry group on either side, and heard the gusty wind howl about the porticoes and balconies of Prince's Gate.

Then the door opened, and he was landed at once in an enchanted scene. The lights dazzled his eyes: flowers and flowering shrubs were heaped up on all sides. In the cloak-room one or two men were lingering, arranging their neckties or merely waiting to give time for their women-folk to shake themselves out. They, too, shook themselves out after the male fashion, squared their shoulders which had just been released from their light overcoats, and walked with a stamping stride across the room. In the tea-room there were more groups. Bertie recognised Miss Churton, who had forgotten him apparently, and Haviland, an Eton and Cambridge friend, whose family he had got to know since he came to town. Alice Haviland, a very stout and very good-natured girl, gave him No. 3.

Lady Tennant was at the top of the stairs, receiving her guests. Bertie looked into her face, worn, fatigued, but essentially refined, with the hope of catching a ray of cordiality. But he could hardly flatter himself that it passed the conventional cordiality which she showed to the majority of her *invités*. Round the door of the dancing-room and just within it stood a little phalanx of black coats. Out of this mass a hand was suddenly held out to Bertie.

"Hollo! Vanlennert, you here?" It was Maynard. They shook hands.

"You're going to dance I suppose."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Bertie, rather absently scanning the crowd within the room.

"I'm not a dancing man myself. Still, it always amuses me to stand and look on. Sometimes one feels one would like to bring a sketch-book. Only I don't think one's hosts would quite appreciate that, would they? I don't mean for the comic side of the business like Du Maurier's drawings, for instance—uncommonly good they are though, I must say. I did once do something of that kind. That was when I first began as an artist. I was in a hospital then and I made some . . ."

But Bertie was clearly not paying attention. Yet, though

he heard little or nothing of the above sentence, he received an impression as if a stranger were speaking to him. He turned his eyes back on his friend. Certainly Maynard looked different somehow, though he could not have said why. The other tried to go on with the conversation.

"You didn't attend my show last Sunday," he said.

"No, I . . . to tell you the truth, I quite forgot. I'm very sorry. Did . . . did it matter?"

Maynard gave an uneasy laugh. "Oh, of course you'd seen them all before," he said. Then he folded his arms, but immediately unfolded them again, thinking that he might look as if he were posing. He put one hand in his pocket. But then he became unpleasantly conscious of the existence of the other hand.

"He doesn't look quite, quite, . . ." an old lady at the opposite side of the room was saying at that moment, as she examined Maynard through her glasses.

"Oh, I think he's adorable," said the lady beside her, notable for her large dove-like eyes and many diamonds. "Of course you must expect an artist to be a little bit Bohemian and not to look like a *petit maitre*."

"But that's rather what I should say. . . . Dear me! that's young Vanlennert I do believe," said the old lady.

"Who's he?" said the other.

"Only a friend of my boy Fred's. He spent a week with us one of his holidays. It must be the same I'm sure."

Beatrice Churton was standing beside her partner just in the entrance to the inner drawing-room and in front of the seat on which sat the two chaperons, and she overheard this dialogue. She looked across, and now she remembered Mr. Vanlennert quite well and where she had met him. For the elder of the two ladies was Lady Mount Orme, one of the most aristocratic of the guests of the evening.

Bertie was still standing near Maynard. Silvia had appeared in sight and was moving towards them on the arm of her partner. How magnificent she looked, and what a conceited ass he! Still, he was tall and good looking, that could not be denied. At this moment Crawford Tennant came by. "How do you do, Vanlennert?" he said. "Not in want of partners, are you? . . . Ah, Maynard, you here! Damned rot this, isn't it? Come to my room and have a smoke?"

"Oh, it rather interests me. It's picturesque in a certain sense. Are you going there now?" Maynard said, hesitating

between a certain interest in the scene itself, his gratified vanity at being there, and his shyness, which made him long for the ease of Tennant's smoking-room.

For the truth is that Maynard was on this occasion suffering almost all the pangs of a young *débutante* at her first ball. As yet he knew hardly anything of society. But he was on the eve of becoming a social lion. "The Cider Makers," his great picture of last year, had attracted much attention. It had only just failed to gain him a fashionable reputation. This year, though the Academy was not yet open, Show Sunday had passed, and the press had already begun to speak of "The Ploughman's Following."

Silvia came near, and at once singled out Bertie for a bow and a smile. Her partner was still talking to her.

"You said I deserved a reward for my virtue, you know. Turning up . . . I believe I was the very first person except my old friend Blades." (So was the Tennants' butler called.)

"Well, Blades hasn't asked for a single dance. . . . How do you do, Mr. Vanlennert? How nice of you to come so early! . . ."

"Oh, Blades . . . I'm afraid his dancing days are over, you know," the other continued.

"May I have a dance?" said Bertie.

"With pleasure." She handed her card. Then, for she was a little confused, "Let me introduce you to Captain Westerton, Mr. Vanlennert," she said. The two men shook hands.

Silvia, it has been said, looked very queen-like this evening. Bertie felt literally dazzled as she stood by him. Her dress seemed made up of some gauzy silk and of silver. A collar of diamonds fastened on to a black velvet band clasped her fair neck. A large bunch of yellow mossy roses lay over one bosom and descended down her dress in a diminishing spray; and roses of the same kind were embedded within her golden hair upon one side of her head. Bertie took the card. Alas! early as it was, the card was nearly filled up, and he only got a dance far down in the list. "May I have an extra?" he said, feeling as if he were growing pale. Silvia nodded and looked at him kindly. She thought that his hand trembled a little as he wrote his name down. She felt a thrill of exquisite satisfaction in the sight and regained all her self-possession. She did not feel less pleasure, from the fact that Captain Westerton was still standing a little on one side.

"And how about the reward of virtue?" he said, when Bertie

had handed back the card, holding his hand out in his turn.

"Oh, virtue is its own reward," said Silvia, ignoring the action.

"Oh, is it. I'll be hanged if I've ever found that out in my life."

"Well, then you can begin to try to-night."

"Oh, I say, that's an awful shame, you know. You as good as promised me another dance."

Bertie felt that he had no place in this dialogue. But he began to hate the man so intensely that he could not tear himself away.

"I don't think I can give you another just now," said Silvia, rather coldly. "But if you want a partner . . . Let me introduce you to my cousin, Miss Reid. She's just by the window . . ."

"Oh, *well* . . ." Bertie heard the man begin as Silvia walked him off.

"At any rate she couldn't stand a beast like that," he said to himself, as he went away to look for Miss Haviland.

Bertie was almost new to London society. Of course, when he had paid visits to his school or college friends he had once or twice come in for a dance. But they never gave such a thing at Netley. One evening, since he had settled in town, when he had been dining at the Haviland's, the dinner ended in a little extempore dance. He got on all right then, and found plenty to talk about. But now the great and constantly growing crowd, the lights, the noise, the brilliant dresses, confused him. It was astonishing how difficult he found it to make conversation with his partner. Above all, the vision of Silvia as she had appeared ten minutes since seemed to stifle all other thoughts, and talk about common things became an impertinence if not a profanity. For if, as has been said, all love is miraculous, there are moments when its superhuman character is doubly present to us.

However, he got on well enough in reality. The good-natured Alice Haviland saw nothing amiss in him, and did not wish to be fatigued by overmuch talk. As he was walking with her out on the landing he met Miss Churton, who clearly recognised him this time, and who happened to be disengaged for the next dance. One of the first things she said to him was, "You know Lady Mount Orme, do you not?"

"Oh, yes. Do you know her?" said Bertie.

"A . . . little, very slightly. Only she's here to-night."

"Oh, is she?"

"Yes. Just in the back drawing-room. Haven't you been in there yet? Would you like to go?"

"Oh, well . . . They're just going to begin, aren't they?" said Bertie, at which Miss Churton wondered.

Then at the end of the dance Gertrude came towards him looking much more cordial than usual. Directly she had shaken hands, she said—

"Lady Mount Orme wants you to come and speak to her, Mr. Vanlennert."

"Yes. Thank you. I was going to," said Bertie. "Miss Churton told me she was here." And Mrs. Forster in her turn wondered at his want of eagerness.

However, this time he went with her. The old lady gave him her left hand without rising.

"How's Orme?" he said.

"Fred? Oh, Fred's in Manitoba. He's getting on very well. At least he writes in very good spirits." Her love of truth did not allow her to say any more, and indeed her face said somewhat less than this. "Here comes my daughter Betty. I daresay you don't remember her. She was in the nursery when you stayed at Amblekirk."

"I remember Mr. Vanlennert," said Lady Betty. "You helped us to bait our hooks one morning. And afterwards Hughey stuck a hook into my leg. I thought it had gone right in and that I should die. But really it had stuck in the stocking and only just scratched me. You pulled it out; do you remember?"

"Oh, I remember all right," said Herbert, heartily. "And that time we let you drive the dog-cart, Orme and I, and you nearly turned it over."

"I did nothing of the kind," said Lady Betty. And so the talk went on.

Lady Betty Orme was a good-looking girl with bright moist blue eyes; not better looking in reality than, at any rate, one out of every five girls who may be seen in a fashionable bonnet or mantle shop or presiding over the bars kept by Messrs. Spiers and Pond. But as "Lady Betty" she passed for a beauty, and divided with Silvia the homage of the room.

From the time of this meeting Bertie's position was secured. Gertrude herself gave him a dance—she had avoided filling up her card and only danced occasionally—and was more pleasant

than he had ever known her. She introduced him, moreover, to several partners.

Apparently these partners had found out that he was a landlord in the Midlands. He on his side discovered that they had rather a monotonous tendency to turn the conversation towards the country and country life. They all seemed to be devoted to hunting, and they generally managed to say something about "our place" in the course of the conversation. If he had enquired *seriatim* as to the locality of these "places," he would have found that in the proportion of nine to one they were situated in the counties of Surrey or Kent.

In Silvia's estimation, too, Bertie rose, when she saw him dancing with Lady Betty and how they both laughed over some reminiscence. She even experienced at this last sight an emotion which, with a good deal of cherishing, might become a colourable imitation of jealousy.

At last *the* dance came. It was the third extra. Silvia had been in to supper. It was that time in the evening when the most uninterested feel a certain elation, and the most decorous some of the excitement which springs from crowds and lights and noise and champagne. Bertie's own feelings may be compared to those of a young captain leading his company into action for the first time. Such an one, too, is or should be *every* as a lover."

He had never danced with Silvia before. A certain delicious fear mingled with his pleasure when the music actually began and as for the first time he put his arm round Silvia's waist. Beside the brightness of her presence the room seemed to grow dark, and all the other beings in it became as mere spectres. They two were alone, and this incomparable being was close to him, her arm upon his arm, he was holding her. The recollection of some of the heroes of chivalry who were said to have swooned at the sight of their lady-loves passed through his mind. "What fools I used to think them!" he said to himself. The next moment he did not know whether he had spoken out loud or no, and he felt a genuine terror that he might make a fool of himself in some such way. They were moving on rhythmically, ecstatically through space. Then out of the rosy mist came Silvia's voice.

"Isn't Lady Betty Orme lovely?" she said. "Have you known her long? She only came out last season, you know."

"Oh, she was quite a child when I was at Amblekirk. Orme, her brother, and I were at the same dame's."

"Is he here to-night?"

"Oh, no. He's out in Canada, Lady Mount Orme says. . . ."

After all they were not floating together in some superlunary region if they could talk like that, he reflected. And now they stopped.

"But I say, *lovely*. That's bosh you know!" Bertie went on.

"But she *is* lovely. You can't pretend you don't think so." And as Silvia said this she raised her blue eyes and looked her partner full in the face. Bertie trembled, and once more remembered the knights of chivalry.

"Oh, I don't really, I can't understand . . . Who ever said Lady Betty Orme was lovely? Pretty, I dare say; but when, when . . . you've got something to measure by . . . you know the difference."

Perhaps he had not achieved a compliment very adroitly; but the tone of his voice was expressive. Now they began to dance again. And as Silvia felt his arm holding her, and the exquisite rhythm of their movement, she thought or felt various things about her partner to which she could have given no expression in words. How different he was somehow from most of her own surroundings! and her own surroundings never quite squared with Silvia's hopes and ideals. Even in the midst of a ball like this, in which she walked a queen, sudden compunctions would seize her, a wish that she were in ~~church~~ instead, far down among the pillars and the echoes of some great cathedral, where deep music was sounding, and along the aisles of which *he*, the Knight, would presently come to meet her. . . . Then the organ would play the wedding march from "Lohengrin"—in this wise her recollection of the opera mingled with her religion. . . . How vulgar this life was by comparison. . . . And wasn't it wicked? . . . All this expense. . . . How different Crawford's standards of life, nay, Gertrude's, too, from the Knight of the Swan's! . . . Bertie Vanlennert was more manly than he had seemed last winter. . . . What had made the change? Though Silvia would never have guessed it, the fact that he had been talking and laughing in a very friendly way with Lady Betty was one element which made for Bertie's greater air of manliness in her eyes.

"Is it true that you want to sell Netley?" she said, suddenly, following without reflection the train of her own thought. Next moment she felt how impertinent the question was.

"Sell Netley? No. Whoever talked of selling Netley?" Bertie flushed and then turned pale. For it came like some

ominous answer from the outside world to his innermost thoughts at that moment.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Silvia, humbly. "Somebody said something about it. It must have been some absurd mistake." And she thought how she could efface the shock she had given. . . .

"Oh, *no*! I can't imagine people ever selling a place that has always belonged to them, where they have been born and all that," Bertie said, earnestly.

And he began to talk more about his private affairs than he had ever done before. And though he did not say much about it, his love of his old home shone through every sentence. And Silvia, only anxious to make amends, was very gentle and sympathetic.

"Don't you," he said, at the end, "don't you think Netley's a nice place to live in?"

"Oh, I think it's lovely!" said Silvia.

"I'm so glad you like it!" he said, fervently.

"How he loves me, poor boy!" Silvia said to herself, when, the dance over, Bertie still stood beside her, and fortunately for him the other partner had not yet appeared. "And didn't I feel rather uncomfortable when I saw him talking to Lady Betty Orme? Yes; I'm sure I did. How she looked into his eyes! He's not exactly handsome, but he looks distinguished. Percy doesn't in the least. Oh, *no*! I could never marry Percy. I believe I am falling in love with poor Bertie."

Then her new partner came up. He was Laycock, of Laycock and Gibbs' bank, one of Silvia's professed admirers. There were three or four of these, all favoured by Silvia's family. Laycock, Glenbyre, were two; a third was Captain Haythrup, Sir John Haythrup's son, a man much of the same stamp as that of which Major Forster had been when he was still Captain Forster and was only a suitor for Gertrude. Silvia never knew how her sister could have married a man with her brother-in-law's reputation, for all his good looks. Still, Gertrude was happy; there was no doubt of that. Then there was Harry Rolleston, son of the Lord Justice, Sir Roper Smyth's colleague—only a second son, certainly, but with a good practice for his age and sure to get on. He was not exactly disfavoured by the Tennants, but he felt that he was hardly in the running with the other three. He was good-natured to the core, an excellent cricketer, likely to grow fat in middle age. There was her second cousin Gilbert Reid; he

was on the Stock Exchange. He looked more like the Swan Knight than the other four. But his ideas were as unromantic as a stock-broker's should be. Besides, after all, Silvia could not remember any overt signs of love on his part. Among all competitors, Percy, in the eyes of the Tennants, was easily first—a safe cabinet minister some day, his friends declared. No; Bertie was, she thought, more interesting than any of these. And Silvia stole a glance at him as she whirled round on the arms of Clifford Laycock, and saw that he was still watching her—rather sadly.

This indeed was Bertie's hour.

But now a star had set, a star had risen. Silvia at a pause became conscious of two voices talking behind her on the landing.

"Bracebridge is determined to press the thing to a division," said one.

"That will put Harborough in an uncommonly tight place if he does," said another.

"The Radicals don't care twopence for that. And I'm bound to say I think they are perfectly right. Harborough had better go over to the other side."

"And make way for Champion, I suppose you mean?"

"Make way for anyone who is really in touch with the party," said the first speaker.

The speakers were two middle aged gentlemen. Silvia recognised one as Mr. Keyworthy, a Queen's Counsel, who had dined at their house—the kind of man who made up the solid background of Lady Tennant's dinner-parties, and whose only way of noticing her or Gertrude was generally by some leaden compliment just at the end of the evening. Silvia remembered, too, with a little thrill of excitement, that this was the night of Bracebridge's motion on the Irish Land Laws which had been much discussed that day at dinner. Lord Wendover and Crawford had been the chief talkers—Sir William was a very silent man, but he had spoken of nothing else; Gertrude had shown herself quite mistress of the subject, and Silvia had been gained by the interest of the others.

She took a turn round the room with her partner Laycock, and they too got on to party politics. When she came back to her former place, the middle-aged gentlemen were still standing there and still concerned with the same subject.

"By Jove!" said the man whom Silvia did not recognise. "Here's young Glenbyre. He'll tell us what's going on. Well, Percy, won or lost?"

"What a ridiculous question! Only lost by seventeen, though. . . . How do you do, Miss Tennant? I hope I'm not quite too late?" Even in Percy's calm manner there was a certain suppressed excitement. He had just made a smart little speech himself, and succeeded in "scoring" off a very dashing and truculent member of the Tory party.

All Silvia's ideas changed. Involuntarily her shoulders stiffened as Bertie had seen them stiffen when he watched her behind her tea-table a fortnight ago. "I dare say some of my intending partners will go soon," she said.

"I trust it's not such a forlorn hope as that," said Percy, coming quite close, and looking very alert and very friendly through his eye-glass. "You promised me one after two o'clock, if you remember, and it's very nearly that now."

"Oh, so I did!" said Silvia. "But I should think the thing you most want is your supper if you've been in the House all day. And as I've had scarcely any, you may take me down, if you will, directly this dance is over," and she turned back to her partner, who did not appear overwell pleased at the turn affairs had taken.

In the supper-room Percy kept Silvia interested three-quarters of an hour with a description of the scene in the House of Commons; and as, by staying there, she had missed two dances for which she was engaged, her disconsolate partners had taken themselves away. So she danced with Percy.

After this came Bertie's second dance. But this time some of his powers of conversation had deserted him, and Silvia's new-fledged love of the country had forsaken her. She no longer thought either of the deep cathedral aisles or the march in "Lohengrin." Perhaps, after all, the modern knights were as well represented by young politicians as by anybody else. Percy's description of the appearance of the House that evening, joined to her own recollections of the place, had made her realise the courage required to address such an assembly; that was the direction, too, in which her father, who was not very conspicuous at home, was rehabilitated in his children's eyes. Of course, Percy had only touched lightly on his own achievement. She heard more of that next day from her father. But she knew the position that he was making for himself. And then she glanced sideways at her present partner Bertie, and thought how he had absolutely done nothing in the world, nothing whatever, was not even capable of earning his daily

bread. No; decidedly, a bucolic existence such as he (she supposed) was destined to lead was not a high kind of life. . . .

But that night in bed her ideas changed once more, and among the faces of all her partners which floated by, one after the other, it was Bertie's that remained with her the longest, and his eager eyes looked at her as she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

VANLENNERT had not given much of his attention to Maynard at the Tennants' dance, his thoughts being occupied elsewhere. Even if he had done so, he could never have surmised that this dance made something of an epoch in the life of the elder man likewise. It would have sounded to Bertie too absurd to think that Maynard, a man of forty, was making his *début* in society. Yet such was the case. His real fame as an artist came after the opening of the Academy in May. By his last year's picture, "The Cider-Makers," he was already known to the more cultivated, though somehow he had just failed to become in any way a lion during the foregoing season. Since then he had been made an Associate. And somehow or other the newspapers had been full of his "Ploughman's Following" before ever it had been hung on the Academy walls.

Lady Tennant, who was clever in these things, and had Crawford's wide knowledge of all kinds of London society to help her, had thus a little anticipated the roll of the wave of fashion. But only a little; and now that May was come, Maynard became quite a usual dish at houses of the cultured fashionable kind. He remembered his former hatred of swells, and his present radical principles, and he despised himself for going out as he did. But he went all the same. When once he was in the midst of the fashionable crowd, he felt how little he had in common with it, and longed to be gone again. And it was an unspeakable relief when the evening—or his share in it—came to an end, and he could stroll in his dress-clothes into the smoking-room of the Hamborough.

What a change it was! There were the old brown walls, the high ceiling, the solid wainscotting, the old paper, once handsome enough, dingy now. There was Connell, the scene-painter, with his short nose and shaggy iron-grey moustache,

his hot-water jug and lemon, and little decanter of whiskey ranged beside him as they were every evening—Connell, who would no more have passed an evening without a pipe in his mouth than he would have passed it on the top of the Nelson column. There was Quain, with the churchwarden, holding forth in his continuous Scotch roll, which fell upon Maynard's ear as pleasantly as the murmur of his own bees on the ears of a home-returning labourer. But though he envied these old pals, their ease, their loose comfortable clothes, he felt a sense of superiority as he strolled in in evening-dress.

"Oh, here comes the lion," would cry out Connell. "Well, Maynard, who's the duchess to-night?"

"None that I know of," the other answered, with a fine show of indifference. "Bring me a brandy and soda, waiter."

"Well, but hang it, man," said Quain. "Ye don't put on those things to look at y'rself in the glass. Come now, where have ye been?"

"Oh, only to the Wendovers'."

"But who are the Wendovers? Tell us, man. Ye know we know nothing about the arrustocrasee."

"Don't be a fool, Quain," and here Maynard settled himself in an armchair. "I hear that you've sold those two dogs of yours."

"Hwy they were a commission—in a manner of speaking, that is. They're just portraits of two bloodhounds belonging to Lorrd . . . Lorrd . . . Well, now, if I haven't forgotten his name. Some lorrd, however. I was stopping near by his place last summer. And the gillie, the keeper man, brought them to me to look at. And I said, 'I'll just have a shot at them as they stand now.' And when this lorrd—I'll forget my own name next—he came down and saw them, he gave me a hundred guineas for the picture before it was finished. He tells me the President's very pleased with them."

"The President. What's his opinion worth?" said Connell, scornfully.

"Oh, hwyt would ye say that?" said the simple-hearted Quain.

"Yes. I don't see that," said Maynard, who had been enlisted on the side of the powers that be.

Just at that moment another artist of the younger group, Dalton, came in, and a furious discussion began to rage. . . .

"'Values,' hwat do ye mean by the values you're always talking about?" said the Scotchman to Dalton. "The value of a picture's in the painting of ut altogether."

Maynard, who in the earlier part of the evening had kept himself well in hand, now relaxed his vigilance. And how in the end he reached Agneta Road he hardly remembered.

Kitty was not, of course, included in the invitations which came to her father. Nevertheless his emergence into the fashionable world affected her also. For one thing, the latter fact led to a *rapprochement* between her and the Churton family, with whom intimacy had been interrupted for the last half-dozen years and more—an interruption due half to the growing fashionableness of the Churtons, half to the increasing puritanism of Mrs. Maynard. Kitty and Ionë Churton, who were not far apart in age, now attended some classes together and became friends.

About the middle of May Kitty was invited to a party at the Churtons'—a mixed party of children and grown-up people it was to be. This was in a manner *her début*. She had never been to any sort of party except quite children's ones, made up of games and romping and presents, and, if in the proper season for it, a Christmas-tree. Maynard had told his wife to get Kitty a dress for the occasion; but even he shrank from confessing that he was taking her to a dance. As it was, Mrs. Maynard did what she thought her duty as a wife required her to do, executed her husband's commission, in a perfunctory way. Almost the first thing which was borne in upon Kitty's consciousness when, with her father, she came into the large house and large company, was the inferiority of her own turnout to that of most of the other girls. Howbeit her face was one that required no setting, and more than one chaperon asked who she was and that she might be introduced to her.

Ionë Churton came forward to take charge of her friend. Maynard left almost immediately.

The studio, which was upon the first floor, was to be devoted to dancing, as Mrs. Churton declined to have her rooms upset for a party of this kind. Churton was not on any important work just now: a study or two in the nude had been carried out of the room. Around the walls were hung one or two sketches, a portrait in oils of three of his daughters, and a good many etchings and engravings from Churton's well-known pictures, with some from those of his friends.

"Of course all papa's pictures are engraved," said Ionë, who knew that that was a mark of distinction. "Are your papa's?"

"Yes, I think so," replied Kitty, who really did not know in the least. "Oh, that's dad's," she said, as she caught sight of

an etching of "The Cider-Makers." "I think I shall be an artist too," she added, after a pause. "Father wants me to."

"I shan't. I shouldn't care to be an artist the least bit. It doesn't lead to anything, Mr. Pemberton says."

"Who is Mr. Pemberton?"

"Why, I told you about him last Thursday. Have you forgotten? I attend his lectures at University College."

"Why did he say that art didn't lead to anything?"

"Oh, that wasn't at a lecture. That was at Mrs. Maperley's. . . . I don't know. I should have liked to ask him if I'd dared. But that's what he said. He meant . . . he meant it did nothing for the good of the world, I expect. . . . Papa would never understand that," she added in a superior tone.

"Father thinks painting the greatest thing in the world," said Kitty.

"And yet he's not near so great a painter as my father," said Ionë.

"I'm sure he is," Kitty said.

"Nonsense," returned the other.

Kitty was deeply offended: by no means because of any passionate admiration for her father, rather in her own person, as his daughter. And yet, in spite of her indignation, she felt that the judgment of Ionë Churton on the value of art was a thing of more weight than the judgment either of Mr. Churton or her own father.

For Ionë, though she was not possessed of many original ideas, enunciated with so much decision the ideas which she had adopted from others, that she imposed them upon people of a self-distrusting nature.

On her side, Ionë was not less offended by the revolt of Kitty, and chose to take no further notice of her for the rest of the evening. Kitty was too proud to make overtures of reconciliation; and she retired sullenly into a corner. The dancing began. At present the children were left very much to themselves, and Kitty stood alone in her corner, no one coming forward to invite her to dance. She was older and taller than most of the children asked, and she could not hide herself away as she would have wished to do. She felt utterly out of place and supremely miserable. Not a few of the elder boys present would have given much to dance with the beautiful girl, but they were too shy to ask to be introduced to her. Then some of the grown-up ladies came in with Mrs. Churton, and one of them recognised Kitty again. Mrs. Churton, seeing

that she was not dancing, sent her boy Tom Churton to ask her.

Tom Churton had been at Eton for four years. He was enough of a man—an Eton boy of seventeen is almost a man—to appreciate Kitty's beauty. But he was enough of a Churton—that is, of the character of all the family except the head of it—to be fully alive to Kitty's outcast situation and the plainness of her frock. It hurt him still more being asked to take part in the dancing now, before the grown-ups had begun to do so, save as on-lookers. So he only walked up to Kitty and offered her his arm without saying a word.

Kitty took it. "I'm afraid I can't dance . . ." she began.

"Can't dance? Why not? Don't you want to?" said Tom, with a sense of relief.

"I—I don't know how to dance—properly."

"Oh!" was all her partner answered, in a voice half injured, half contemptuous, and without more ado he walked off.

Kitty did not know much of the world. But she felt that she had been insulted. She retired still further into her corner, and summoned up all her pride to keep the tears from overflowing. Never had she felt so wretched.

Tom Churton had, before long, the pleasure of dancing with a come-out young lady, a very tall, rather stylish, decidedly plain Miss Birdwood, for whom he had a passionate admiration. Twice he passed one dark corner of the room and could not prevent his eyes from turning towards Kitty, who appeared to be bent on an earnest examination of the parquet floor; and, as he looked, his conscience gave him a stab, for he was good-hearted at the bottom. Now that he had got all he wished, he could not forgive himself—could not understand why he had been so churlish a few minutes before. It was with no small relief that presently he saw a rather short dark gentleman whom Beatrice had been making a good deal of stop suddenly as he was passing the corner and say—

"Hollo, Kitty! Are you here?"

Kitty, who had felt like an outcast from all human sympathy, now felt like a person escaped from drowning. Wonderful that it should again be Bertie who rescued her from what seemed almost worse than death. (Unrealisable by the grown-up are the agonies of sensitive children.) She could not look up, or her eyes would have overflowed. But she held out her hand and Bertie took it. He did not look at her very attentively.

"Well, my dear Kitty," he said, "what are you doing in a

corner by yourself?" He was absent-minded; at every new arrival his eyes went to the door in the hope of seeing Silvia Tennant. "Aren't you going to dance?" he continued.

"I c-can't," answered Kitty, huskily.

"Can't? why not?" he said, as Tom Churton had done, but in a very different tone.

"I can't dance well."

"Oh, you'll get along all right. You're light enough. Come along."

He put his arm round her. Kitty's heart gave a great throb. And from that moment she found that her love of Herbert Vanlennert, which up to till now had been a pure child of imagination, had become a reality. This dancing, this new thing, dancing with a man, and that man him: it was more than ecstasy. If only she could manage it better! She spoke the truth in saying she could not dance properly. For the last six years, dancing had been omitted from the curriculum of the Maynard household, and her father, though he interfered to get his daughter the society which he thought desirable, never gave a thought to the details necessary to her enjoyment thereof.

Howbeit for a while Kitty lost all her self-consciousness in the delicious sense of being whirled round by the paragon of human kind. Ever afterwards the touch of the black sleeve of an evening coat had indescribable associations, not less the faint scent mingled of perfume and of tobacco which came from her partner. She still hardly dared to look up, for there were still unshed tears in her eyes. She saw not how she went, and seemed to whirl from light to gloom and back to light again like our planet as it spins through eternity. But—Bertie was not a first-rate dancer, his thoughts were elsewhere, and a girl turned sixteen is not nothing to carry round. All of a sudden Kitty's foot became entangled in her partner's. Both were shot violently against a sofa on which two people were seated. Kitty, with a sharp cry of pain, fell against one of these two, a lady; Bertie just prevented himself from falling by catching hold of the sofa back.

It was the utmost depth of humiliation to have been so clumsy. It was to be hoped Silvia had not seen the catastrophe. His first thought was this: when he looked at Kitty, she was white as a sheet. The seated lady put her arm round her; the next moment, with a "honk," her head fell back in a faint. She had, in fact, broken again a tendon of the ankle

which had been injured last September. Now, if she knew it, her dancing days were over.

At once the dancing stopped, and a crowd began to gather round the sofa.

"How did it happen?"

"What's the matter?"

"A tumble, I suppose."

"Dear me, how very . . ."

"Clumsy," Bertie supposed was the word which he did not catch. No doubt the sympathies of the spectators were not in his favour. For nothing could have been more moving than the picture which Kitty presented at that moment. Her pale face lay against the shoulder of the lady, Mrs. Ayntree, who had caught her. Shaded by masses of red-brown hair, it showed the pure curve from ear to chin, which, though it still kept a touch of childish roundness, was even now one of the distinctions of Kitty's face, and what more than anything else served to carry it over the boundary which separates prettiness from beauty. Her thick eyelashes, one shade darker than her hair, were still wet with the unshed tears of ten minutes ago, which she had not yet succeeded in winking back again. Thus there was a very general stir of interest among the nearer dancers. But the room was a large one and was pretty full now. At this moment, Bertie caught sight of Silvia in the doorway, and, with the intense selfishness of a lover, he was in a fever of doubt as to what she might have seen or what she might hear of the accident.

However, he forced himself outwardly to show due consideration. Somebody produced a bottle of salts. Kitty opened her eyes, and a faint flush of colour came back to her cheeks. Several middle-aged gentlemen and married ladies fell in love with her on the instant. Nobody more so than Mrs. Ayntree. Kitty tried to stand up; but when her foot touched the ground, a half cry escaped her. Bertie was roused to genuine commiseration.

"Have you hurt yourself, Kitty?" he said in his gentlest tones.

A blush spread over Kitty's face, and she gave a look out of her eyes that filled Mrs. Ayntree's heart with jealousy and pleasure at once.

"She must have sprained her ankle," she said. "I think if you will help her downstairs with me, I will take her at once to my house and get my husband to look at it. I shall just

catch him ; he was coming to fetch me . . . Unfortunately I have sent my carriage back," she added.

"Mine's at the door," said another, a stout, good-natured lady. "Pray take that. Would you ask for Mrs. Brandon Blane's carriage?" she said to Bertie.

And so it was arranged. Bertie and Mrs. Ayntree took Kitty downstairs, supporting her, almost carrying her. "It's just as it was at Schellingen," she said, faintly. Now the pain had gone for a moment, she felt only weak and supremely happy. There must be some meaning in the extraordinary coincidence that Mr. Vanlennert—Mr. *Bertie* Vanlennert, she said to herself, with a delightful thrill of audacity—should twice in her life have helped to carry her after she had sprained her ankle. And once more, as she had often done, Kitty went through in memory all the incidents of the first accident, above all the moment when she had hung with both her arms round Bertie's neck.

Mrs. Ayntree's thoughts were at that moment in sympathy with Kitty's. What a delightful romance it would make if these two were to marry, all as a result of this day's accident! "I wonder who he is?"

Bertie's was a face which always commended itself to ladies of thirty and upwards, either on account of its air of extreme refinement, both of thought and feeling, or on account of its tragic possibilities which have been before suggested. Ladies of thirty and upwards have generally got over the enthusiasm for the glossy moist-eyed military man who captivates their younger sisters.

Mrs. Ayntree was a sentimental woman. She made a religion of it. Her husband, a surgeon and a professor, and herself belonged to the sect called Agnostics. It was a part of their creed or of their profession to make a great display of the domestic affections. "I must try and get to know him," she went on with her meditations. "As for the lovely Kitty, I shall certainly not lose sight of her." But when, after further enquiry, Laura Ayntree learnt that Bertie was a country squire, she was disposed to give him up as being out of the sphere of a surgeon's wife, possibly even out of that of Kitty's. "Though only a fool could possibly give her up," she thought. Still she was only a child, and young squires are snapped up so soon.

Bertie returned to the studio as soon as possible. Alas! he found that Gertrude and Silvia had only come in for half

an hour and were going on to a reception at the Foreign Office. Silvia was very bright and pleasant. She had heard about the accident.

"You're quite a knight-errant, Mr. Vanlennert," she said. "Don't you remember how you told us at Gretton how you had rescued a beautiful damsel from falling into a crevasse."

"But I've not resc . . ."

"Why, it must be the same, isn't it?" Gertrude exclaimed. "Didn't you say she was Mr. Maynard's daughter?"

"No, really?" said Silvia, in surprise.

"Yes, it is," Bertie nodded. "But, as I said, I've done just the opposite this time, unfortunately. . . ."

"There must be some secret significance in the circumstance," said Gertrude, nodding her head in mock solemnity. "Good-bye, Mr. Vanlennert. I'm sorry we are obliged to go on."

She shook hands frankly; she was as cordial and pleasant as possible, and Silvia's tone and manner were just those of her sister.

Soon after the Tennants had left, Vanlennert encountered Maynard at the door of the studio. After leaving his daughter, he had gone to dine at his club, and so knew nothing of Kitty's accident. He had a flushed cheek and a curious brightness of the eyes, Bertie noticed. But he remembered that Maynard was always different in society from what he was at home.

"Oh, here you are," the artist said; "very glad to see you. I suppose you've seen Ki—my daughter. I've come to take her home. But I will have a word with Churton first." He spoke with an air of great seriousness.

("That's Mr. Maynard, who painted that beautiful picture in the Academy," said one lady to another.)

"I'm sorry to say she's had a slight accident," said Herbert. "She sprained her ankle again, and has had to go home. It was my fault, too, I'm afraid."

But Maynard did not seem to be paying much attention. Baldwin, a distinguished Academician, came up at this moment.

"Ah, Maynard," he said, in his dandified way, "you're a regular social lion. Didn't know you went in for this sort of thing so much. Most of us are just going away I fancy."

"I came in order to fetch away my daughter," Maynard answered, with the same intense gravity. "Do you know my

daughter? She's here somewhere. I'll introduce you to her. . . ."

Herbert stared, and Maynard looking round, caught his eye. Then he flushed more than before.

"That is to say," he went on, "she is not here at this moment, as she's had a slight accident. Do you know my friend Mr. Vanlennert? Mr. Vanlennert, Mr. Baldwin. You'll be having your portrait painted some day to hang up in your place, Vanlennert, and nobody can do it for you as Baldwin can. . . . Excuse me a moment; I have to speak a word to Churton before I take my daughter home," and he walked away.

Baldwin looked at him with a face expressive of a good deal of annoyance, and then turned his back on Bertie without saying a word.

"Really," said the latter to himself, as he too followed Maynard with his eyes, "one would almost think he was screwed. Anyhow, he's deuced queer manners, I must say."

CHAPTER XIV.

FROM this time, this early spring of the year and of his own life, Bertie's whole self became transformed. The fever of a first love had now full hold upon him—that unaccountable disease which, nine times out of ten, begins in nothing, ends in nothing, and which in itself is so delirious and phantasmal that to after-memory it seems while it existed to have been nothing likewise—

". . . Such stuff
As dreams are made of."

All that—in nine cases out of ten—is not phantasmal is the scar which it leaves upon the soul, which after-years will not efface.

In the Middle Ages it happened to many a hermit or monk to be, like Paul or the Seer of Patmos, caught up in a trance and to be carried from earth to visit the regions of the damned and of the blessed. The body of the visionary lay rigid from cock-crow to sundown, his soul made the journey in those not-often traversed regions. Sometimes he approached so near the

flames that he was actually scorched in hand or foot by them. And always to the end of his days on earth the mortal body of the seer bore the marks which the flames had left upon his spiritual body. We in our days make these heavenward, hellward voyages; and generally the guide, the pilot of them, is called Cupido or Love. Moreover, if you look closely at your fellow-men, you may detect on these, too, the outward marks of the scars which have been laid upon their souls. Only this difference lies between the pilgrimages of then and now. The former went through hell and purgatory to heaven: with us the course lies the other way.

Now when practical jokes were toward at Dodge's, or in the rooms of his school and college friends, Vanlennert joined in them with much less spirit than of old, till even these friends began to notice the difference.

"What's the matter with Vanlennert?" said Ricketts one day when Bertie had left chambers. "He seems to have got what they call in Whitechapel 'the blooming 'ump.'"

"Is he in love?" suggested Spofforth.

"I fancy he's rather hard up," said Alleyne. "Something's gone wrong with his affairs. I thought he was only qualifying for the bar with a view to the duties of a J. P. But he says he means to practise if he can."

But if many things turned towards depression, there was one new and strange experience that Herbert Vanlennert had at this time, which was as full of excitement and of elation as the drinking in of laughing gas.

One morning when he went to see Bertram—he had become a privileged visitor in Bertram's rooms—his host had said—

"By the way, I asked Bradshaw if he could give you a bit of reviewing and he left a book for you. . . ."

Herbert's heart almost stopped beating with excitement.

He took his book home. There were some numbers of the *Piccadilly Review* lying about his room. He ordered half a dozen back ones at a shop, and for two days he incessantly studied the style of that journal. He had never thought so much about style before.

After three days of continuous work the article was finished. And then in the evening of the day following the proof came in. He had actually become an author of a sort. True he had been limited to half a column. Yet still was not this a tremendous step in life? Crawford Tennant himself would have

to think more of him so soon as it was known that he was on the staff of the *Piccadilly*. And what a lot they would think of him at home! He could imagine Mrs. Orcher's amiable surprise and her, "My dear Bertie, we had none of us any idea you were coming out like that."

The chances of a meeting with your beloved, unless you are especially well looked-on at the house of her parents, how few they seem compared with the desires of passionate love! No doubt Herbert was getting more and more into the Tennant set. But even now a whole week would sometimes pass without his seeing Silvia. And man must work. Vanlennert was beginning to realise his share in the lot of Adam. But then, had he not actually begun to earn for himself—by literature too?

Like other young gentlemen of his class, Herbert occasionally hired a nag and rode alone or with one or other of his friends in the park. After he had tried all sorts of different times for his exercise and fortune had not favoured him,—the next time he met Miss Tennant he asked her whether she never did the same thing. "Oh, yes!" Silvia said; and examination of the facts showed that he had missed her by five minutes upon one side on one occasion, by a quarter of an hour upon the other side on another.

"When do you think you will ride again?" he said.

"Monday perhaps," said Silvia, smiling to herself.

"You're always like that," said Herbert, gloomily.

"Like what?"

"You always say perhaps, and then very often you don't go. You said that about the Anstruthers'."

"Mama could not take me," Silvia said, in feigned innocence.

"Well, then, you don't want anyone to take you out to ride in the park, so there won't be any 'perhaps,' will there?"

"Very well, then," she said, with a touch of soft yielding which knocked vigorously at his heart.

On that Monday morning Herbert found upon his breakfast-table a letter in Molly's hand.

"DEAR BERTIE," she wrote. "I have been thinking a long time whether I ought to tell you something, and now I have made up my mind that you ought to know it. You remember the talk we had one morning last January about what Wheatley had been

telling you about your affairs at Netley. You said—do you remember?—‘Wheatley says there will be only margin enough to give me an allowance of four hundred a year or so. Of course that is precious little. But I shall manage to make it do, you’ll see.’ And I said, ‘Do you think that things are ever likely to get worse?’ ‘Oh no,’ you said, ‘Wheatley thinks they are about at their worst now, and when things are like that they are sure to mend soon.’ Well, I’m afraid they must be worse now, or else they were worse then than you thought. I’ve known one thing for some time and didn’t like to tell you; but I think I ought to have done, because you know it was always our rule to tell each other everything which was going on in the House of Lords. For a good long time your allowance has not been a surplus from the Netley money: father paid it himself, or most of it. Mother let that out one day when we were talking about you. She did not know that she had told me, and from the way she has talked since I feel sure I was not meant to know it. But all the same, I think it is better you should, for I feel sure you would rather know the truth than not. Of course, if you insist, you can get the exact truth out of Wheatley, and I daresay (I’m sure I hope so) that now it may not be so (only, to tell you the truth, I *think* it is still). Anyhow, I hope it soon will be *quite* different. Dear Bertie, I hope you won’t be angry with me for not telling you this sooner. I know you won’t for my telling you now. Are you working very hard? I hope you are having some fun. I heard from Sybil Attewoode that they had met you at a large ball in Portland Place and that you had dined with them the week before; and I heard from Silvia Tennant that they had seen a good deal of you. Is she as pretty as ever? Sybil asked me to stay with them the second week in June. But as Mrs. Orcher insists on my going to Interlaken with them in July, I think I must not go away just now.

“I wish you could run down here for a day or two; I am sure it would do you good. Next Thursday’s your birthday; I hope you haven’t forgotten that. Couldn’t you run down and keep it with us? It has been a lovely month. All the May and the bluebells are out now. Parker’s spinney is a mass of them, and so are the Netley woods. If you don’t come down on Tuesday I’ll send you some. You really ought to smell a breath of your native land. We have no news, except that poor old Mrs. Rudge is really dying this time. You remember who she is. She was the old woman who told you that the air

and got between her skin and her body. Our housemaid Mary marries William Snell next week. Come down and you can be the best man—or perhaps you'd like to take the duty for father. With love from us all, your affectionate cousin,

“MOLLY.”

This was not the news calculated to cheer up one with whom a short ecstatic dream of perfect bliss had begun once more to fade away before the onslaughts of doubt. “All these things are against me,” was the burden of Bertie's thought when, his breakfast finished, he turned to his desk and to his work. A cloud was drawn over the thought of his meeting with Silvia that very morning. Yes: it was true. He must get on somehow. That was his only chance. Still—still—if *she* would only trust him. What mattered the rest? . . . “To gain me, to get on, that is the one chance,” said the other voice; and he settled down to his task. Yes, he would certainly manage to get this article done. It was only half-past nine now. He had read his book *The Lost New Zealander*, made his notes, marked his passages. There was the mere writing of a column of review.

“In the book before us,” he began, “the author attempts to present a picture——” For a moment Silvia came before his mind's eye, just as he had seen her three or four days before. Ah, how exquisite she would look on horseback!—“a picture” (what was I going to say?) “of the state of society in an imaginary republic.” (Had he rightly understood that she was going to ride between twelve and one that day? My God! he thought, suppose she were to get there and I were not to turn up! and she were to be offended and I lost her by such a trifle! and governed by laws passed by the classes who, in the opinion of the writer . . .”

“Oh, good heavens! what rot I am writing! I wonder if she really understands what I feel about her, and when she said—Hang it all, though, I *must* get this done. Try again—

“‘The creation of Utopias has always been a soothing and an innocent exercise: nor do we feel any sort of grudge against those who, like the author of *The Lost New Zealander*, place us in imagination among conditions which probably he himself, no, “they themselves”) would be the first to find intolerable were they once made real. *The Lost New Zealander*, we may explain—perhaps the explanation is unnecessary—is our old friend Macaulay's New Zealander . . .’ By Jove, it would be

better to begin with that and cut the first sentence out; it is confoundedly long. No, hang it! I can't be always cutting out. (She won't be alone, after all! That's it. She wanted to put me off and so she settled twelve: I expect she generally rides at ten. I shall find Crawford riding with her. I hate that chap. I wish I didn't: but I can't help it; I do. And in a way—that's the worst part of it—I'm afraid of him. That's the worst experience of all I have now. Things put me in a funk. . . .)

"Am I going cracked? I must be the weakest, most *miserable* creature in existence. I can't make myself stick to the simplest piece of work. How should I manage to speak in the House of Commons, for example, like Glenbyre? Half-past ten. By God! But I will get the thing done. . . . But, by Jove, I must order the horse. I'll have him brought round at half-past eleven. . . ."

The review had just been done when Bertie heard the stamp of a horse, and looking down from his second floor window, saw his animal waiting outside. His hands trembled so that he could hardly fold up the packet to give to O'Brien to get posted.

But when he was mounted he felt happier. After all, he *had* done the article that he said he would do. It might not be as difficult as making a speech in the House. But it wasn't easy—not for him, whatever it might be for other fellows. His education had put him at a disadvantage compared to Lawes or Rosefield or any of those chaps. When he was on horseback he always felt himself again. After all, what a state of mind he had been getting into about a trifle! Even if to-day were not a propitious day with Silvia, there would be plenty of other days.

"But to thyself be true,
Thou canst not then be false to any man,"

Bertie said to himself as he cantered up Arlington Street and trotted along Piccadilly. And Molly's letter came back pleasantly to his mind. He thought only of the picture of the country which it called up: not of his pecuniary troubles any more. . . .

How bright the street looked in that mid-day sunshine, which, discreetly veiled as it was, yet sent dazzling reflections from verandahs and conservatories! How wonderful was the throng of brilliant dresses and carriages and handsome cattle that were

turning into the Park at Hyde Park Corner! He encountered the Attewoodes' carriage at the corner—Mrs. Attewoode and Sybil. Delightful she looked in her summer dress all drab and lace and with parasol to match; and how pleasantly they both nodded to him! After all, it was a happy world and all was going well. . . .

And there on a grey cob was the graceful figure—inclining just one shade to *embonpoint*—of Silvia Tennant, and, "oh, blessed Fortune! alone," Bertie thought for one-half second; the next his heart sank: a whole party joined her, Miss Reid, a cousin of Gilbert Reid, and her married sister Mrs. Lovejoy, Gilbert himself, Crawfurd, and a M. de Camperdan from the French Embassy—quite a cavalcade. They were all very merry. Sentiment, Bertie felt, was for the nonce banished to the planet Jupiter. Everybody was making ridiculous puns and saying just the sort of idiotic things that he used to like saying when—yes, when he was a boy a short six months ago. How much his intercourse with the serious Silvia had changed him! he thought. And now their parts were reversed.

Mrs. Lovejoy and her sister were of the same order of looks, deep-eyed, plump, and good-looking. They both appeared to enjoy Crawfurd's talk, which, when he was with women, never strayed very far from the borderland of the *equivoque*.

The subject he had started was the new Wellington Statue which had not yet been set up opposite Hyde Park Corner, though the place had been prepared for it. Crawfurd had seen the original plaster cast in Sir Edgar Boehm's studio.

"But," said he, pointing to Achilles, "that's by far the handsomest portrait of the duke."

"How silly you are!" said Miss Reid.

"Why silly?"

"Because you know perfectly well that's Achilles?"

"Who was he?"

"Don't you know who Achilles was? Then I shan't tell you."

"But I swear it's awfully like the Duke of Wellington. Let's go up and look close." They were just at the end of the row as he said this.

"No; I don't want to," and Miss Reid turned her horse round.

"I expect you never have looked at the statue close or else you'd have noticed the likeness. Of course a person looks different with all his regimentals on, and in that dress . . ."

"Yes, that *dress*," said Mrs. Lovejoy.

"We all do," said Crawford, and he turned to tell a story *sotto voce* to Mrs. Lovejoy about an American and a railway barmaid. But he spoke loud enough to let Miss Reid hear if she chose to listen while pretending that she did not.

M. de Camperdan was paying elaborate compliments to Silvia, and neither Vanlennert nor Gilbert Reid was strong enough in French to join in. They both stuck to their places, however, and before very long Crawford had to go off with the Frenchman. Mrs. Lovejoy and Miss Reid joined another party of riders, who, like them, were going to the north side of the Park, and Silvia was left with her cousin Gilbert and Herbert Vanlennert.

Reid had begun the conversation with Silvia and was asking after her future engagements. He still kept the ball in his hands. Was she going to the Hammerfords' dance to-morrow? Yes, she was.

"Hang it," thought Bertie, "I don't know the Hammerfords. I wonder if it would be possible to get a card? Too late I'm afraid. And then I ought to go down to Gretton, as Molly says. . . . Still, if I *can* get a card . . . Wednesday would do."

Gilbert Reid was still going on :

"It's the Academy Soirée on Saturday. You generally go to that, don't you?"

"Yes; but I don't know whether I shall be able to go this year. Crawford and I dine with my godfather on Saturday; I don't expect he'll care to take me on."

"Oh, make him. . . . By the way, when is Frank coming back?"

"He expects to be in Paris on Monday week; Gertrude's going to meet him there."

"How glad he must be to get back!" said Reid, in a heavy manner.

"Well, I hope so, certainly," said Silvia, laughing. "Most good husbands are glad to get back to their wives, aren't they?"

"I should be if I had such a charming wife as he has," said Reid, with an emphasis which was so far successful that it conveyed to Silvia the meaning that it was meant to convey, so far a failure that, though the matter of it could not but please, the manner of it seemed ridiculous.

"Isn't it a beautiful morning, Mr. Vanlennert?" she said. "I suppose you often ride here in the mornings, don't you?"

"Not very often. That's why I wanted to know so much when you did. As it is, you know I've never . . ."

"The flowers are just perfect now, aren't they? Look at that red cactus flower, for instance, and the dark bushes behind it." Silvia went on without giving him time to finish.

"Bless me!" said Reid. "It's one o'clock. There's my man waiting for me. I must say good-bye."

And he shook hands and was gone.

"I think I must be riding home, too," said Silvia.

"Oh, not just yet! . . ." And this time Bertie's tones had so much expression in them that his companion involuntarily turned a little pale.

"Good heavens," said a voice deep within her, "what I shall do if . . . I've not the least thought over the matter. I could not possibly say 'yes,' and yet I should not like to say 'no.'"

"It's such a lovely morning, you know," he added.

"Yes. It's very nice," she said, with a cheerful air. . . . "You're lucky in not being obliged to go to business like my cousin."

"Oh, but I have work," Bertie began.

"You're reading for the bar, aren't you?" said Silvia, with a condescending manner.

"Yes." How was it that the literary world had not yet talked of his contributions to the *Piccadilly*?

"Of course that's work which you can do when you like," she went on, still in the elder-sisterly manner.

"Not all of it. I ought to have gone to an office this morning—to the *Piccadilly Review*." Bertie brought this out hurriedly. It quite missed fire.

"Then why didn't you?"

"Oh, well, it was such a lovely morning," he answered, craning as an Englishman always does at a leap into sentiment. "And—and—I've never met you riding here before."

Silvia rigidly looked straight in front of her, for she knew that Bertie's eyes were rivetted upon her face.

"Dear me! That can't be the Prince. Oh, no, of course not. It looks rather like him at a distance, doesn't it?"

"Do you ride here often?" Herbert went on. "You wouldn't tell me the other night what time you generally rode?"

"Oh, 'not very often, and not very long,' I might say." ("I must go home now," Silvia said to herself. "But it's such a lovely morning. . . .")

"One so seldom sees any one in London," her companion went on, doggedly.

"Oh, do you think so? One lives much nearer to most of one's friends in London at any rate."

"Are you going to the Masborough Thompsons'?" Bertie continued, irrelevantly.

"No, we're not. At least I don't think so. They asked us, but . . ."

"What a bore!" (with a sigh.) "I accepted because I thought you were almost sure to be there."

"That was very nice of you," Silvia was going to say. But her heart softened suddenly and she said, "That was very good of you," in a tone different from that consecrated to the stereotyped phrase of young-ladydom.

"It would have been very good if you had come."

"I suppose you would not have accepted if you only thought we *might* come?" Silvia said, smiling, chiefly for the sake of saying something.

"How do you mean? Of course I would go anywhere where there was the slightest chance of meeting you."

"You didn't *say* that, you know. You said you only accepted because you thought we were sure to come."

"What is 'we'? I'm sure I didn't say anything about we."

"We is Gertrude and I. Gertrude's gone now to Paris to meet her husband. Did you know that, by the by? So anyway she could not have gone to the dance. But she hopes she'll be back in a fortnight. My brother-in-law has left India for good. I should like you to meet him, he's . . ."

"I am afraid," said Bertie, very solemnly, "Mrs. Forster doesn't like me very much."

"Oh, I'm sure she does, Mr. Vaulennert." Silvia pulled out her watch. A sudden nervousness seized her. She was on the edge: she realised that. She realised, too, quite as clearly, that she had no idea what she would do or say should the margin be passed. "Dear me, half-past one," she said. "I really must be going now;" and she held out her hand, but carefully avoided meeting Bertie's eye.

Her embarrassment gave him courage.

"You needn't go this very minute. You can stay ten minutes more," he said, decisively, as he took her hand in a firm grasp. For one instant Silvia raised her eyes to his and let them fall at once.

"No, I'm very sorry, I really must go directly."

"One minute?" He still held her hand.

"No, really." She gently withdrew her hand. "I'm very sorry," she added, in a muffled voice.

"Can I come to lunch on Sunday week? I'm going out of town for a week, but . . ."

"Oh, do. . . . Good-bye," said Silvia, looking up at last.

"Good-bye, then." They shook hands once more. Bertie raised his hat, and she was gone.

She was gone. There was a singing in Bertie's ears. Had it been real what had just passed, or only a creation of his fancy? Yes, it was real. He could still feel Silvia's little logskin-gloved hand in his own. Even through his own glove it seemed to him he felt exactly the touch of hers. What a little hand after all, compared to a man's! And had not her eyes fallen before his? Their positions were changed, were changing. He worshipped her no bit the less, but still . . . he was a woman as well as a goddess.

Every time he looked at Silvia it was as if he saw her for the first time. How beautifully the colour of her cheeks faded away towards the forehead and towards her neck! That neck . . . rising from above her habit. . . . The whole beauty and grace and charm of womanhood was in it. And then her ear. . . . Then that momentary timid glance of her blue eyes. It was like the opening of heaven. Her eyelashes were golden in the light. A symbol of absolute innocence and purity, those sky-blue eyes and their golden lashes. . . . Bertie remembered what Ned Bertram had said once about the ideal feminine—wasn't it?—of Goethe's Gretchen. . . . Some people were stupid enough not to like light eyelashes. He saw now that they were the most celestial that there could be.

And then there remained the fact that she must know how much he cared for her. . . . She had been quite different when they parted from what she had been hitherto. It must be going to be all right. It seemed impossible—*impossible* to think of Silvia ever caring for him. . . . But if Providence willed, even that might be. . . . She was such an ideally pure, delicate-minded woman, that the thought of being made love to rather frightened her.

Only . . . only . . . Wouldn't it have been better to have taken his courage in both hands and have told her all at once then and here? . . . Why had she not given him that one minute?

He ought to have taken it, though. . . . But after all it could

not matter. He should be back so soon again. And she must know. And . . . and he *would* have the courage to speak then, and . . .

At this point the vision of happiness which rose before Bertie's mind seemed so exquisite that he was almost afraid to contemplate it. Instead, he concentrated all his thought in the palm of his right hand where Silvia's little gloved hand seemed still to rest. A world filled full of happiness was this world which God had created. Bertie was riding into the mews as he made that reflection. The smell of the stables rose deliciously into his nostrils, as it must do to all who have been bred in country life, among country sports. The thought of the country rose enticingly before him. He felt sure now that by a visit to Wheatley he should set all things right. Never mind the Hammerfords' dance. He would go now and get back in a week's time.

If Herbert Vanlennert had not quite understood why Silvia had acted as she had done, this was the less strange, because she was just as ignorant.

It was true of her that behind the flirtatious habits of a girl in society there remained a deep-seated well of natural purity almost of shrinking from the opposite sex. She went home with her thoughts all confused—a little frightened even by the passionate look in Bertie's eyes. Then she thought with an instinctive humility, what was there in her to make any man care for her so much? . . . And he was a man now. . . . She used to call him a boy; only five months ago he had been no more. (He had grown visibly older since then, had been hardened by silent battles of the spirit, by alternate hope and fear.)

But other people did not see that—Crawfurd always treated him as almost a nonentity. And it must be owned he was not brilliant in general conversation. One must *know* him to find this out. . . . Yes; that was it. She seemed to know Bertie better than any of her other adorers, though she had known most of them much longer. She must choose somebody; she could not choose Percy Glenbyre. She knew him, too, in a sense, but except just to talk to—he was pleasant enough to talk to—but . . .

Should she ever dare to choose Bertie . . . to present him to her mother and Gertrude and Crawfurd as her choice? That was the question.

At all events she had not to make the choice yet.

CHAPTER XV.

THE next day saw Bertie in the train on his way to Stretton-by-Hales, the station for Gretton. And suddenly, when he found himself passing by fields and hedge-rows, his London life fell off him like a dream.

With the rumbling of the train, time seemed to roll back and bring him the country peace which he had known while he was still a boy. How happy he had been in those days! Those days when he cared for no woman's society but Molly's—far-distant days, separated from these present ones by a few months and yet lying almost beyond the horizon of memory.

He passed in review other bygone springs that he had spent at Netley. Among these past times, one special day of one spring season years ago rose into his mind. As a boy he had cared little for books but as a temporary distraction and amusement. It was the out-of-doors' world that had made his life till then. His reading had been of Lever's novels, *Lewis Arundel*, *Sponge's Sporting Tour*, *Mr. Jorrocks's Hunt*, a Bulwer Lytton, or even a Scott now and then, varied by detective stories. This spring for the first time he had embarked upon a better class of literature, and had begun with Thackeray, and on that special day seven years ago, the eve of his seventeenth birthday, he had gone out with the last volume of *The Newcomes* under his arm, had passed through Netley Wood, and climbed up to Sir Richard's Seat, a summer-house in the Georgian Doric style, half built, half carved out of the limestone rock, overlooking the woods and the valley beyond. His grandfather's grandfather, General Sir Richard Vanlennert, had built this unsightly Pisgah. But the land over which it looked was a land of promise. From that seat Bertie saw below him the Netley woods nodding in light slumber in the summer heat, and over there beyond the ponds, beyond the house, beyond the Park, he looked down the Brawl Valley, with its green fields and stone walls and cheerful English husbandries. It was near the end of the fat years of increasing prosperity, when old Mr. Vanlennert's tenants thrived upon the low immemorial rents at which their farms were let.

By turns Bertie read and looked over the sunny landscape. A little below him, on a platform of the rock, grew a white-

thorn, full-scented and haunted by bees and flies. Presently as he read he came upon the quotation which you may find put in the mouth of George Warrington in the thirty-eighth chapter of the second volume of *The Newcomes*. It is from Peele's *Polyhymnia*—

“ His golden locks time hath to silver turned;
O time too swift, O swiftness never ceasing!”

he read. For the first while in his life, as if he had opened a magic chamber, some vision of the pathos of life and of some understanding of the beauty and meaning of verse broke upon him—

“ His golden locks time hath to silver turned;
O time too swift, O swiftness never ceasing!
His youth 'gainst time and age hath ever spurned,
Yet spurned in vain: youth waneth by increasing.”

Not so much the meaning of the poem as the melodious sound of the words—that it was that arrested him. Or shall I say it was that second meaning which, in virtue of its mere words and images, poetry always has linked to the principal theme? Herbert did not think of Colonel Newcome, nor even of the eremite suggested in the words of the poem. The “golden locks” were rather the golden light of the sun which hung over the distant valley. “O time too swift”—that was the multitudinous life of that May morning, with its thousand sights and sounds—Henry washing down the carriage in the stable-yard; old Greely was in it as he cracked his whip, and the team of four strong horses drew the heavy timber-waggon, which crunched and snarled its way through the wood below his feet. The bees in the hawthorn close beside him were in it; and not less the flight of rooks that he descried diminished to the size of midges far out in the sunny valley.

Over all this pleasure was drawn, like a thin veil of cloud before the sun, the tender shadow of sorrow and loss which the whole verse conveys. “O time too swift . . . Yet spurned *in vain* ;” an inexpressible and endless sorrow lies in these things. Herbert Vanlennert was not essentially of the literary temperament, so that this vision of the world of poetry soon grew dim. But that day he had had it—a revelation not less real than to the Seer of Patmos. For such unveilings of the heavens take place now as then.

tie had indicated his train to Molly; and then, a sudden
 ing seizing him to be away from all the dust and roar of
 own, he had taken an earlier train than he mentioned,
 the result that he found himself at Stretton in the begin-
 of the afternoon, with the prospect of kicking his heels
 for two hours and a half, unless he liked to hire a trap
 e Swan. He chose the part of economy, and wandered
 the station into the town.

re the scene was yet more transformed. It was market
 too; the town was all astir, and on every side the young
 e as he wandered about heard the delicious broad speech
 is native county, which was like a mother-tongue to him.
 wide, paved market-place opened before him. There stood
 Swan at one corner. The front of the inn was thronged
 farmers in gaiters and light covert coats, red-faced men,
 ing and joking, while an odour of beer and spirits floated
 nd them.

Oh, *good-morning*, sir!" "Good-morning, Mr. Vanlennert,
 glad to see you in these parts again," said respectively a bar-
 and a broad middle-aged farmer who was standing by the
 as he passed in. How pleasant and friendly it all was!
 od-morning to you, sir; what would you please to like for
 eon, sir?" said the landlord. . . .

Very good, sir. Mary, some cold fowl and ham for Mr.
 ennert. . . . Yes, sir, the coffee-room's empty. Our
 linary's just over, you see, sir. Unless you would prefer a
 upstairs, Mr. Vanlennert."

Rumbolt, your young squire's back again," he heard say a
 in the passage, as the servant opened the door to bring
 is lunch. The landlord returned to give him the *West*
yshire Gazette.

Seen a flower-show or something of that at Burton Broad-
 I see by the paper, sir. P'raps you'd like to see the
 ant of it."

erbert came out again into the market-place, where the
 et was in full swing. Groups of cattle and sheep, some
 ens and some not, thronged all the space and sprawled
 s the footway. Under the pricks of their driver's goads
 ie blows of sticks they pushed, backed, lowed, bellowed,
 ed, amid a chorus of barking dogs and rumbling carts
 gigs. When these noises abated a little, the chimes of the
 ch bells rose clear above all. But at other times the more
 cal din was rather felt than heard.

The auctioneer was standing by the pens, in front of a small standing desk; farmers were passing round, feeling the sheep with their hands.

"'Ere, gentlemen," said the auctioneer, "is ninety tegs. Now, how much shall I say apiece? Well, to begin with forty-four shillings . . . forty-six . . . forty-seven . . . and a 'alf. Now, Mr. Threadworthy, am I to let them go at forty-seven and a 'alf? You won't get better tegs than them anywhere. Very well, then," and his stick came down upon the desk in front of him.

"Twenty-five tegs," the auctioneer went on, "at twenty-five . . . twenty-six . . . thirty. Come now, that's better . . . thirty-one . . . against you, Mr. Bradshaw . . . thirty-three . . . Is that you, Mr. Townsend? I always say you know what's what. Thirty-four . . . Going to Mr. Bradshaw at thirty-four . . . going, gentlemen . . . thirty-four.

"Now here are eighteen ewes and eighteen lambs—a single couple. Shall we say seventy? Very fine lambs, you see, gentlemen, quite ready for the butcher" (butcher as he pronounced it would have rhymed to smutcher). "Seventy-one . . . two . . . three . . . seventy-five. Mr. Hardy, you're not bidding to-day. These are just the animals for your farm, you know. Am I to stop at seventy-five? Very well, then."

It was all very delightful, very refreshing. Bertie turned aside for a moment and strolled a few paces down the broad Market Street. All the houses were built of stone. The street was paved with stone. But everywhere between the houses, beneath the arches and courts, you caught sight of trees—chestnuts in flower, ashes and beeches in all the greenness of early summer.

Ah, if he only had Silvia with him! Yet even that would come some day. Some day—ah, yes, it must be so! "We shall arrive, not here, at Burton Station, and be met by our smartest landau. And when we get to Hatherley Gate, we shall find a triumphal arch across the road, and be met, I expect, by a cavalcade of tenants, and drive back with them at our heels through more triumphal arches to Netley Village and up to the hall, and there we shall inaugurate an eternity of happiness." Imagination created for him the sensation of Silvia leaning just a little, not so as to show, against his arm. Then by its aid he saw himself and her alighting at Netley, going into the library, and shutting the door. Then how she would turn round; she would throw her arms round his neck,

and they would look straight into each other's eyes, and—Oh, God, it was too delicious to think of; and Silvia would say . . . "What would she say?" Somehow, at this point his imagination seemed to play him false. Or earlier? Could he really imagine the dignified Silvia throwing her arms round his neck? Here—for he had unconsciously turned back to the market-place—the auctioneer's voice once more fell upon his ears. The auctioneer had passed to the opposite side of the place, and was selling cattle now.

"I had the pleasure of selling last week," he was saying, "this heifer to Mr. Rumbolt. She was sold with her calf. But the calf was lost, and the gentleman would not take her single. So now I put her up again. Now, any bid, gentlemen? Ten—oh, come, gentlemen, ten guineas . . . eleven . . . going at eleven." (Stick.)

"This one, I sold her calf last week for two ten. I guarantee 'er a good milker. . . . William, you want milk, I know. Now come, at twelve pound. . . ." And the bidding went on. The bells had stopped chiming. The church clock struck five. The pony-trap would be here in ten minutes. How empty the market-place was getting! What a frightful mess the cattle had made all over the town! How every thing came to an end!

Molly's heart beat painfully as she drove the carriage round the little sweep which led to the station entrance. For, there he was. Would he be the same as ever, or changed? How much changed? That Silvia fancy *might* be quite a passing one. He had rarely spoken of her in his letters. Was that a good sign or a bad?

A moment as he waved his hand to her Bertie looked the same as ever. His voice and smile were cheerful enough. But when he had taken his seat at her side Molly's quick glance scrutinised his face. Worse, worse than she thought. He had grown up to be a man. Their old peaceful days were gone forever; their old confidences, Bertie's old dependence on his cousin, all forby! Her future life at Gretton seemed to grow dark before her.

But no reflection of this sudden flood of gloomy thoughts appeared in Molly's deep, cheerful voice.

"You are a good boy to do as you are told for once in your life," she said. "But you don't look very well. Have you been working too hard? It's very clever of you to write those reviews you sent us. I had no idea you were so clever."

Altogether it was a glorious evening, one to be remembered in after-years. They had tea at six under the big cedar on the lawn, he, Molly, and Aunt Marion. Uncle George joined them in the middle, his hands finely soiled with his gardening.

"You Londoners never do a stroke of useful work, and so you never get a bit of colour into your hands. It is not dirt, it's only brown," he said, holding up a pair of earthy paws to Molly. "We quite look upon you as a cockney now, Bertie. Have you seen the Queen? That used to be the proper thing to say to anybody when they had been up to town for the season. That is to say, it was 'Have you seen the King?' the first time I ever went up to London. That was in thirty or thirty-one. Upon my soul, I forget which. Oh, yes, it would be thirty. . . . I suppose I was—how old shall we say, my dear?—a baby in arms. . . . Ten, Molly? Do you mean to pretend I was born in 1820? I don't believe a word of it. . . ."

How wonderful it was to sit there and be fanned by the soft warm air and hear the buzzing of the bees! To sit amid all this peace and contentment; to find too that down there, at any rate, his contributions to literature were not overlooked! Uncle George was fairly astonished by them, and they all felt or recognised, as Molly had done, that Bertie had grown up.

"I tell you what, you'll have to stand for the county," Uncle George had said.

All unpleasant subjects were banished for that evening.

But the next morning Herbert said, "I think I'll ride over and see Wheatley."

Uncle George's face fell.

"See Wheatley? Yes, I should think that would be a very good thing to do," he said.

On a clouded east-windy morning Herbert rode over to Wheatley's house, "The Cray," Long Stretton—over part of the road that he had traversed last night. It was a comfortable, square, white house, with a long one-storied wing on the right, and in this wing stood Mr. Wheatley's offices. At the back of these stood the stable-yard; and Bertie, as soon as he had dismounted, walked at once into Wheatley's room.

"Good-morning, Mr. Herbert. How are you, sir?" said Wheatley, getting up to shake hands, and then standing with his back to the mantelpiece. "When did you arrive? I suppose you've been very gay this season in London. Dear me!

I'm glad I've not got to pass my days in London. Nor of course have you, if you don't choose," he added.

"Well, that depends I was just coming to . . ." the other began.

"Not going to be married, are you? Of course, in that case, where you live depends upon where your wife chooses." (Bertie's colour heightened a little, partly in self-consciousness, partly in anger, partly also in pleasure. A wonderful, an inconceivable event seemed to come nearer, when it was spoken of so naturally.) "But I suppose I've no right to ask such a question. Only as I've known you since you were in long clothes I might almost say—I believe I gave you your first riding lesson."

Bertie was mollified. "Oh, no, I'm not going to get married. It's nothing to do with that my coming to see you," he said. "I only wanted to learn how things stand with the Netley property and all that."

"Of course, of course. It's quite right you should go into the matter thoroughly. Let me see, you must be nearly twenty-four; aren't you?" And as he said this, Wheatley wheeled forward an old morocco-covered arm-chair for Bertie to sit in.

"I am twenty-four to-morrow," Bertie answered, taking the seat offered.

"Bless me! Yes, and at twenty-three you came of age according to your grandfather's will. Well, it's time you took the estate into your own hands. Your uncle George . . . (He made a pause. "Isn't much of a man of business," he was going to say; but he thought better of it) . . . "has, of course, acted for you up to now," he said.

"I did go into . . . some accounts and that sort of thing last January," Bertie said. He could not the least remember what he had gone into, or how far that act could be considered the actual taking upon his own shoulders the burden of his property.

"I remember. You authorised me to sell a portion of the Cantway farm if I could come to an agreement with Hinks and could get a decent price for it. Unfortunately, I can't get an offer which it would be worth your while to look at. You see," Wheatley went on, sitting down with his back to the table and stretching his gaitered legs out towards the grate—"there's no doubt about it—they are doing very badly—the Tythe Vale Company's doing very badly with their iron and coal just now. The workmen are really leaving the neighbour-

hood ; so instead of more cottages being wanted many of those that are built are without tenants. All that makes it worse for Hinks and the other farmers roundabout. You see Cantway farm has been turned altogether into a dairy farm and a farm for market produce ; and now the demand for all those things has gone down immensely. The result is that Hinks has sent me word that he will be obliged to leave the midsummer following unless we'll return another twenty-five per cent. of his rent. Now, that will bring it down to not much more than one-half of what it was four years ago. And that's a very serious thing." At this Wheatley turned his eyes, which had hitherto been staring into the little fire, straight upon the young landlord.

"What do you propose to do?" said the latter.

"Well, that's just the question I wanted to consult you about. Of course, if we could have split the farm, or even part of it, up into allotments at say 6*d.* a perch, that's four pounds an acre, and that would have paid us very well. Or we might, as I thought last winter, have sold part or the whole of it. You see that bit lies so much out of the way of all your other property that I've always been in favour of selling it myself, provided you could get your price for it. Your uncle George is of the same opinion. Of course nothing would have induced your grandfather to think of such a thing. It's a great pity, though. . . . I suppose you've no recollection of your father?" he asked rather irrelevantly.

"I have a very vague one. I remember being with him. I remember his bringing me to Netley. I suppose that was soon after my mother died. I have even a very vague remembrance of my mother."

"*Have* you?" said Wheatley, turning upon him suddenly. But he immediately returned to the previous subject. "Well, I was going to say I remember proposing to your poor grandfather to get rid of that farm altogether. Your father, as I daresay you know, left some rather heavy debts, with which as a matter of fact the property has been encumbered ever since. . . . Your cousin Edmund too, of course you know what a lot of trouble the family have had about him."

"Poor Edmund," said Bertie. "I remember him quite well: when I first came to Netley I used to look up to him immensely. He's five or six years older than I am."

"Yes. The Major married very young. If anything were to happen to you Edmund would come into the property, and

make ducks and drakes with it I've no doubt. Fortunately, that's not likely to happen. . . . Well, as I was saying, there was a good deal to pay, and then again two years before your grandfather died we'd begun returning ten or fifteen per cent. of the rent all round. So I proposed to get rid of Hinks and try the allotment plan. But he wouldn't hear of it."

"Then is that what you propose to do now?" said Bertie.

"If we *could*. But I'm afraid there's no use thinking of such a thing now, for the reasons I've given you. You know Bradbury the builder would have bought Berry hill for the purpose of erecting villas and cottages on it. . . ."

"And he won't now?"

"Oh, he's bankrupt. He's over-built the place as it is, and half his cottages are unlet. Yes, he's bankrupt, poor Bradbury." And as he said this Wheatley struck and rubbed his thigh. The second motion signified meditation of a sorrowful kind on the undeserved misfortunes of Bradbury; but in the movement which preceded it there had mingled, against his will, a grain of triumph, such as one business man always feels when he hears that another not he has sunk beneath the flood.

Bertie felt relieved. In the natural course of things—now that he understood the full bearings of the matter—he would no more have thought of turning out an old tenant like Hinks than would his grandfather: albeit, owing to the outlying position of Cantway farm, its tenants did not come into such close relations with their landlord as those on the rest of the estate. But during his yesterday's reflections in the train and in the course of his ride to "The Cray" this morning, he had come to realise more clearly than ever before how serious a thing it might be for him if his affairs did not speedily take a favourable turn. After all, what good to him in any near future were those literary abilities of which they thought so much down here, and of which he himself was beginning to be proud? It seemed wonderful to be able to write at all. But it could not really be so wonderful as he thought it, seeing how many people did it, and how little, after all, they were paid. Of course his writing was not going to be such as theirs, not always. . . . But, but . . . Ah, if Silvia really cared for him and would wait. . . . But had he any right to ask her? . . . Would she be allowed to?

"No," Wheatley went on, after a reflective pause, "I do not know that I could advise you now, with things in their present

state, to take the farm out of Hinks's hands. And of course if you don't do so there is nothing for it but to do what he requires in the way of a reduction of rent. Though that is a very serious step; because goodness knows what Playgood or Rumbolt or even Hillyard will say to that."

"Still, if you think there is no other course . . ." said Bertie.

"Upon my word I'm not sure that there is," said Wheatley.

At that moment Wheatley's clerk brought in a telegram.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Vanlennert," said the agent, "I must leave you for a moment. But I hope you'll honour me by staying to lunch. Mrs. Wheatley was saying the other day that she had not seen you for two years."

"I shall be very glad."

"Let me see, it's one o'clock now. We lunch at half-past. I'm afraid I shall be engaged for a few minutes. Would you rather stay here or stroll into the garden? You'll probably find my wife there." Bertie took this as a hint that it would be more convenient if he left the office.

He passed out into the garden—turning to the left instead of the right into the stable-yard—all confused in mind and profoundly discontented with himself. He had come there that morning meaning to get a thorough insight into his affairs; and had up till now learnt—nothing. It had been the same last January; now he recalled the fact. He had made efforts then, which had resulted in blank failure. Why was that? What stupidity was it in him that prevented him from understanding what other people took for granted? Or was it merely weakness on his part, that allowed them always to put things from *their* point of view without considering his? He felt somehow cajoled, befooled, yet without the least conscious design on Wheatley's part to cajole and befool him. Deep in his mind he entertained the conviction that if Wheatley would thoroughly and honestly make him master of the condition of affairs he, Herbert Vanlennert, not only had the most right but the most capacity to come to a wise decision upon them. But he felt intuitively that it was both Wheatley's instinct and his interest to keep the threads in his own hands; yet that he had neither character nor brains enough to accept the sole responsibility for his actions. No, damn it! Wheatley had made a fool of him. He would be hanged if he stayed to lunch with them. And with this resolution he returned to the office again.

He found Wheatley with two telegraph forms on the desk

before him, solemnly reading over once more the despatch he had received.

"I'm very sorry, Wheatley, I find I can't stay to lunch," Bertie said.

"Oh, I'm sorry, too. Better luck the next time," the other smiled back in his frank way.

"I must come over again. We've not done much business this morning, and I'm only here for a few days."

"Do—do. Come on Friday if you are at liberty. Shall we say Friday morning? And then you can bring me your decision about Hinks's farm."

"But we can't spend *all* our time in discussing Hinks's farm. There is so much more I want to talk about."

Wheatley smiled good-humouredly at this ebullition of youthful impatience. To a man at his comfortable time of life, who spends half an hour over the wording of a telegram, a couple of days do not seem long for the decision of such a question as that of the Cantway farm.

"Do you think, then, you will accept Hinks's conditions and let him stay on?"

"Don't *you* think that's the best thing to do?"

"Upon my word I hardly like to say. I told you what are the objections to that course, but if . . ."

"But what do you advise?"

"Upon my soul I hardly like to give advice upon such a point. Still, if you absolutely leave the decision in my hands . . ."

"Well, perhaps we'd better leave it till Friday, and then when we have discussed the whole affairs of the estate I shall be able to make up my mind."

"Very good. That is the best plan I should say. I will expect you on Friday morning. What time shall I say?—eleven?—half-past? twelve? You'll stay to lunch then, I hope. We must drink your health, you know."

"Pleasure. We'd better begin as early as possible, I should think. Say eleven."

"Very good; good-morning, Mr. Vanlennert. Rather cold for this time of year, isn't it?"

"Am I different from everybody else?" Bertie said to himself as he rode back to Gretton. "How coolly that beggar takes everything! *He's* perfectly satisfied with himself and his own abilities. And so infernally good-natured too! He

doesn't look as if anything could put him out. It's like what Goldsmith says about the French—'Pleased with himself whom all the world can please.' And Uncle George is another of very much the same sort. They are awfully good fellows both of them; Uncle George is a regular brick . . . I must settle that question about the allowance—Confound it! There's another thing I quite forgot—I hope Molly is wrong. . . . I can't take it. And I must, whenever I can, pay him back. But above all, I must do it in a way not to hurt his feelings. He is a regular brick. But I wish to the *deuce* he would not go on treating me as if I were an infant in arms; and Wheatley too. I don't believe either of them in the least understands any difficult business. . . . I daresay Wheatley is all right in any ordinary matters of farming, and if everything is going well. But now that we are in a difficulty I don't trust his judgment a bit. It's infernal that I should be saddled with him because his father was agent before him; and *he* because he was the son of an ensign in my great-grandfather's regiment. What infernal chains your grandfathers and great-grandfathers forge about you! After all, though, if I blame any one, I ought to begin with my own father. All my real troubles come from him. . . .

"If it were *only* all right with me, I could marry Silvia straight away. Oh, God, how happy I should be! That's why the Tennants give me the cold shoulder. They know what difficulties I am in. I never saw that so clearly before. Perhaps they really know more than I do. . . ." He remembered Silvia's question about his selling Netley. Ah, what a stab from a beloved hand! He did not realise at the time what a stab it was. "But I must find out the exact truth. Oh, my God, it *is* hard! If I'd been born poor, and hadn't all the appearance of being rich, it wouldn't be so bad. Suppose Charlie was in love with Silvia, how easy it would be for him! He *will* see her, very likely. Oh, God, it *is* hard. You *might* help me a little. All because my father would not be contented with what he'd got.

"How weak-minded all this is! Think of Lawes, who at twenty-two began to support his mother and sisters by his literary work, and has done so ever since, and earns his three or four pounds a day without turning a hair. I, with frightful exertions, can earn two or three pounds in a lucky week. What is that where Silvia is concerned? What *am* I to do? Shall I ever really get to the bottom of these Netley affairs—

in a way to do any good? I am the weakest, most worthless creature on the face of all God's earth."

With such-like thoughts making a perfect hell within him, Bertie alighted at Gretton Rectory a little late for lunch. A roar of laughter greeted him as he opened the dining-room door, and he found that Mr. Brown, the parson of Mallaby, and his wife had come over to lunch. Brown was the great *raconteur* of the clerical body in that part of the county. In personal appearance he was not unlike Wheatley—large-whiskered, broad-shouldered, eupeptic.

"My God," said Bertie to himself, "is the world full of such people?"

"How dreadfully he is changed!" Molly said to herself the evening of that second day, as she was undressing. "I suppose it's for Silvia. . . . But if he really cares for her, she must care for him. . . . She's not fit really to tie his boot-strings. . . . There's something awfully fine about Bertie. . . . It'll come out. . . . Perhaps it's better for us all to suffer. . . . She's a very commonplace girl if you take away her good looks, and they're not of a kind to last very long. . . ."

Molly tried to wish impartially the best thing for her cousin—her best brother. But why should he want to marry so soon, and fall in love with the first girl he saw, like that?

Herbert forced himself to go as thoroughly as possible into the affairs of the estate while he was in the country. He did not see much that he could alter for the better. But, at any rate, he understood, as he never had before, how things lay. It was not a pleasant knowledge. But he looked facts in the face to the best of his ability. And before the end of the first week in June he got back to town.

CHAPTER XVI.

On the Saturday which Herbert spent at Gretton, Crawford and Silvia Tennant dined with Sir Roper Smyth. It was no party: only a few friends to wish the old Lord Justice many happy returns of his birthday.

Sir Roper was a bachelor and not in the habit of giving en-

tertainments of any sort to both sexes, except when his sister Mrs. Macnamara was staying with him. But she nearly always stayed with him at this time, and when there she always took the opportunity of arranging some dinner of this kind in her brother's honour. Sir Roper was not particular as to either the quantity or the quality of his guests, and Mrs. Macnamara, though she was well enough in Dublin society, was not precisely "in Society" in London. On the other hand, so far as their more material constituents went, these dinners in Harley Street (that was where Sir Roper lived) were extremely *recherchés*. Crawford alleged the wine as a reason for not missing them.

When the two Tennants arrived they found beside Sir Roper only Mrs. Macnamara and her son Vincent Macnamara. The latter was an oldish-youngish man. He had a bald head—bald to shininess—and a thick, light-brown beard. But the mildness of his pale-blue eyes and the almost childlike innocence of his face, which too was as smooth and free from wrinkles as his hair and beard were free from grey, contradicted the first impression of middle-agedness. He was in fact only just thirty-five.

Vincent Macnamara was more or less known to all the Tennants. Ten years ago when (as his mother told everybody; but there are so many sons who do that) he had carried all before him at Trinity College, Dublin, he had come up to eat dinners in London with a view to practising at the English bar. And during his stay in town he had fallen deeply in love with Lucy, the eldest of the Tennant girls. Sir Roper Smyth had just been made a puisne judge (so were they called in those days); Sir William Tennant was not Sir William then. He had in fact not yet been called within the bar, and had never contested a single constituency. So, though Vincent was no catch, he was not altogether a despicable suitor.

But at this moment came the Tennants' vein of luck. Mr. Tennant took silk and won the critical constituency of Bulge-ness, in one and the same year: and Bolitho, the banker, turned up and whisked off the gentle Lucy. Vincent for his part, instead of setting the Thames on fire, or even the Liffey, by mounting to the Irish bench in half a dozen years, had after his return to Dublin gradually given up practice and had been content to live, the only son of a widow, with his mother in Merrion Square, and to devote himself to abstract subjects such as neither she nor Sir Roper cared anything about. So, in spite of his filial goodness, Vincent was something of a dis-

appointment. By the Tennant family he was always spoken of as "poor Vincent Macnamara," with an affection mingled with contempt. In Silvia's eyes, who had been quite a child when those sentimental passages were toward, he had the same kind of interest which in after-life one always feels for one's first pony or the first theatre to which one was taken.

Mrs. Macnamara was a brisk little Englishwoman, in whom her brother's bizarre features were softened down to something almost like prettiness. By long residence in Ireland she had acquired a touch of brogue. She chose to consider herself thrown away in Dublin society, though in point of fact her husband, Colonel Macnamara, had been socially her superior. She was always engaged in the search for a suitable partner for Vincent: at any rate she always professed and believed herself engaged on this generous mission. Miss Millhay, who with her mother—a school-friend of Mrs. Macnamara—had come to dinner, was one of the persons she had in her eye. Miss Millhay held the Tennants in secret fear and dislike. Sir Roper knew nothing of all this, and had never been made a confidant of the love-passages—if there had been any—between his nephew and Lucy Tennant. Sir Andrew Bruce, the Queen's Remembrancer, and his wife, Miss Dalglish, the daughter of a poor Scottish peer, an unmarried lady in the thirties with a *pince-nez* and literary proclivities, and two other gentlemen whom Silvia did not know, made up the party.

One of the two unknowns was presently introduced to Silvia to take her down to dinner. "Mr. Bertram, a friend of my son's," was Mrs. Macnamara's whispered explanation. The truth is that, if Vincent Macnamara was still capable of romantic passion, his admiration for Edward Bertram and his writings might be called one. Both were in the same line of study. But they represented respectively the masculine and feminine elements in philosophy. Vincent was the subtlest of disputants. But he never could bring himself to pronounce definitely for one side or the other. His secret sympathies were with the school of thought which Bertram upheld with unswerving steadiness.

It was on account of the friendship of these two, formed ten years ago, that Bertram now found himself performing so strange an act as taking a young lady of fashion down to dinner.

Silvia glanced at her partner. He did not seem particularly embarrassed. But he did not speak one single word on the

way to the dining-room except "Take care" when Silvia made a false step on the stairs. He unfolded his napkin in silence, and Silvia had leisure to take in his solid-looking head and face and to notice the creases on his dress coat.

"This is very amusing," she said to herself; "I wonder if he is going to be silent all through dinner."

But suddenly Bertram turned upon her a face full of intelligence with a humorous smile lurking about the lips.

"I think," he said, rather as if he were continuing a conversation than beginning one, "that is, I flatter myself I have invented a new theory of conversation; at any rate a new method—*l'art de la conversation*, you know, as you see in the French grammars."

"Indeed! That was a great achievement and very much needed, I should think," said Silvia.

"It's particularly applicable to two people who meet each other for the first time, as in our case. That is what made me think of it. . . . Some people, you know," Bertram went on leisurely between the spoonfuls of his soup . . . "have thought of the plan . . . of imposing the subjects of conversation on their guests . . . and having it written down as a *menu*. . . ."

"Oh, I've never heard of that idea." Silvia said this merely because he had come to a long pause.

"Yes, they have. . . . Thought of a *menu*" (and now he had finished his soup) "with, I suppose, appropriate conversation written opposite the different dishes as they do the wine at big public dinners" (Silvia made a reflection when he said that); "the weather, I suppose, with the soup (No champagne, thank you), society with the fish . . ."

"Only with the fish."

"The respective merits of town and country with the *entrées*, sport with the joint, a solid subject with most people which might be made to last the rest of the dinner, unless . . ."

"It would not with me. I don't care much for sport, do you?"

"Not the least. Well, then you might allow literature and the arts to have a look in during the dessert. Politics, of course, come in after the ladies have gone."

"I think I should stick to literature and the arts," said Silvia. Perhaps if she had been beside a different partner she would have made a different choice. But she divined that these were likely to be the subjects in favour with her neighbour.

"Ah, well. Now you have made my plan unnecessary. . . ."

"Oh, but please explain your plan. That *menu* plan isn't yours, is it?"

"No. My plan is this. I divide all the possible subjects of conversation into four heads: first, Nature, under which head come all kinds of sport, you know; second, Persons, which includes all common acquaintance, gossip and that sort of thing; then you come to Subjects, such as politics and religion and all abstract questions of that kind; and fourthly, books and music, and that sort of thing; Shakespeare and the musical glasses, art and literature, as we said just now."

"But I don't understand what comes after this."

"Well, I should let one person cut, so to say, and the other choose; I mean, one person should decide which of the four classes was to come first, and then the other person would choose the special subject out of each class."

"But suppose one were to choose a subject the other knew nothing about?"

"That's just the game. It's like that game of cards, I forget exactly which it is, *nap* or *poker* or something where you choose the trumps."

Silvia laughed. It was as a matter of fact not often that she did laugh. But there seemed to her something delightfully free and amusing in the turn their conversation had taken.

"Well, I should not choose Shakespeare and the musical glasses, because I expect you would have so much the advantage of me. I shall choose No. 2. What is it?—persons—and I expect that I shall win, because I don't know that we know any of each other's friends."

"Yes. There are our hosts, for example. And besides, I know one of your acquaintances, at any rate—Herbert Vannert."

"Oh, do you?" said Silvia in an altered tone, and in spite of herself she blushed—but not with pleasure. She suspected a trap.

"I hope you like him, though, or we won't talk about him."

"Oh, yes, I like him very much," said Silvia, in rather an absent voice. "How sad Mr. Macnamara looks beside Miss Millhay! I think you can't have told him your new art of conversation; or, at any rate, he finds it no good in the present case."

Vincent Macnamara was not sad. He had only become rather absent. For a general conversation had begun between his mother, Miss Dalglish, Crawford Tennant, and Sir Andrew

Bruce. Mrs. Macnamara had brought up the perennial subject of the iniquities of the Land League, and from that they had passed to Mr. Gladstone's Irish policy and his land bills. From thence to the rights and wrongs of legislation in dealing with private property is but a step.

It was on this last point, the abstract question, that Vincent Macnamara's attention had been arrested.

"It's all superstition," Crawford was saying. "It's bound up with that word 'property.' Your property's what the law allows you to keep out of your earnings—that's all."

"But you can't mean that the majority of voters, merely because they've nothing to lose, have unlimited rights over what richer people have?" Vincent interposed, turning rather pink, as he generally did when he engaged in any serious argument.

"Why not?" said Crawford. "What you call the majority of the electors are really the representatives of the nation. You could never have any property at all if it were not for the protection which government—that is, the nation, again—gives you. It has a right to charge as high a price for that protection as it pleases. Of course it may not pay to charge too high a price for it: that is another question."

"Then ye don't believe in abstract justice at all?" Vincent's brogue became more pronounced as he got eager.

"Where does your abstract justice come in? A nation is a body of individuals banded together for their mutual advantage and insurance. Property would not be worth a day's purchase if the majority of the individuals had not agreed to secure it. But if the majority once find out that they gain no advantage by doing this, they are perfectly free to change the arrangement."

Silvia was chiefly struck by hearing Crawford speak so seriously on this question. But every now and then he had these impulses. He liked to show that if he did not always crush his opponents in argument, it was only because he did not take the trouble to do so. He had from old days cherished a slight secret rancour against Vincent Macnamara.

"Well, one can't argue such a question as abstract justice at a dinner-table," said his opponent. "But it seems to me ye've gone back about two thousand years in your political morality. What you say is just what Thrasymachus says in the *Republic*."

"What republic is that?" said Miss Millhay.

"Why, Plato's *Republic*," Vincent answered.

"Oh!" she said, trying to seem enlightened.

Both Mrs. Macnamara and Miss Dalglish looked at Vincent with respect.

"I know it is," said Crawford, with a return to his indifferent manner—"‘εἶναι τὸ δίκαιον οὐκ ἄλλο τί ἢ τὸ τοῦ κρείττονος συμφέρον,’ and the rest of it. Socrates only got the best in those arguments" (he turned to Miss Dalglish beside him as he spoke) "because Plato doctored the others' speeches afterwards, and made them give themselves away. Besides, he was so fond of talking they could hardly get a word in edgeways. . . . In that respect he is like our venerable leader," he added, looking towards Sir Andrew Bruce, who smiled.

"Your venerable leader doesn't profess such cynical opinions," said Sir Roper Smyth from the other end of the table. "It's at the dictates of the most exalted virtue that he puts his hands into other people's pockets."

"Now, Mr. Tennant, do you conscientiously believe that Mr. Gladstone is sincere?" said Mrs. Macnamara.

Crawford shrugged his shoulders.

"What I think is so horrible," Bertram suddenly broke in, "is not what one politician or another does or does not do, or what motive he alleges for doing or not doing it—for it's sure not to be the genuine one—but that the nation itself should be losing its sense of justice." The speaker was now fairly launched; he had practically forgotten who were his audience, and his voice took a finer inflexion than it had before. "Of course people have always wanted to despoil their neighbours," he continued, "and always will do as long as the world goes on. It is the attempt to give robbery a high religious and moral sanction that is the worst of it. They seem to have invented a new commandment: '*Thou shalt not steal; but ye shall, provided ye are numerous enough to vote that stealing is a form of benevolence.*' I suppose we have always been a hypocritical nation. It belongs to our Puritanism, to *ce tour d'esprit biblique*, which everyone notices as our national character. It's fortunate for us that we've never had the gift of seeing ourselves as others see us. . . . Did you ever read?" he said, after a moment's pause, in which his thoughts had wandered beyond the subject in hand, turning suddenly upon Miss Dalglish upon his left, to whom he had not yet spoken, "that passage in Michelet on the English character?"

"I think I have. But tell it me again," she answered, try-

ing to be quite at her ease, for Bertram's penetrating glance rather disconcerted her.

"It is the most tremendous indictment I ever read. And it is made *à propos* of the most shameful act ever committed by Englishmen, the burning of Joan of Arc. Michelet asks how it is that the English, who prided themselves upon their chivalry; how could the Earl of Warwick, for instance, the 'Gentleman' *par excellence*, have consented to take part in so mean, so utterly base, an action. And then he goes on—I don't recollect the precise words, but it's something like this: '*Parmi tant de bonnes et solides qualités ce grand peuple Anglais a un vice qui gâte ces qualités mêmes . . .*'" Bertram was beginning.

"But I don't believe that we're a hypocritical nation," put in Miss Dalglish, as he paused to take breath. "Do you?"

"No, I'm sure we are not," said Mrs. Macnamara.

"I should say we were just the reverse," said the Queen's Remembrancer.

What Silvia could not help wondering at was the fact that her companion should have launched upon a quotation from the French, being possessed of such a very poor accent. But, somehow, when she looked at his solid, unperturbed face, this seemed rather a merit than a defect.

As for Bertram himself, he made no reply to these hostile criticisms. Nor did he attempt to finish what he had begun to quote. For a moment it seemed as if he did not hear them. Then he slightly raised his shoulders. "Well, I don't know," he said, and at that moment a servant brought a dish to his side, and he turned round and helped himself from it.

The general conversation drifted away to other topics. But Silvia's neighbour still appeared to be ruminating. The dinner was finished; the butler went round the table with port and claret. Then Bertram turned again to Silvia.

"Everybody tries to do things on the cheap," he said. "Their benevolence as much as anything else. It is so easy to be charitable at the expense of other people."

"But don't you think it is a great shame," she answered, "that those landlords in Ireland should grind the people down as they do? Or that some of those manufacturers should grind down their workmen so? There is a horrid Mr. Carthwaite. He has built a great, ugly house at Addington, close to where we used to live. They say that he is a dreadfully vulgar man, and that he began life as a common labourer, and now that he has hundreds of thousands of pounds. Now he

has got rich, he tries to forget what he was, and works his people so hard and grinds them down so. I am sure the law ought to stop that."

"How do you know he grinds his people down?" said Bertram.

"They struck last year for a little more wages—only a penny half-penny an hour more, I believe. And people say he is rolling in money."

"But three half-pence an hour, when you are employing thousands of workmen, may make all the difference between profit and none at all. Say he has a thousand hands. . . ." And Bertram began a rapid mental calculation.

Silvia, however, broke in at once. "Well, I don't see what right he has to the profits any more than his workmen. They make the nails or screws, or whatever it is, not he."

"That is just the way people always talk," Bertram answered, somewhat brusquely. "Why, that Carthwaite you are speaking of, he made his fortune because he invented the reversible propeller. The amount of work he gets out of his men now is just the same as the amount of work he would have got out of them if they had gone on making screws of the old pattern. . . . In fact," he went on, "your argument is the same as the man's who said that he and the great artist made the pictures together, he stretched the canvases and his master put the paint on to them. Of course, if that were a true representation of the case, the artist who gets two thousand pounds for a picture ought to pay the canvas-stretcher ten times as much as the artist who only gets two hundred."

"Do you care very much about pictures," said Silvia, in rather a fine-ladyish manner. Gentle as she was, she had been not a little nettled by Bertram's brusque deportment, and spoke under a sudden impulse of self-assertion.

Bertram turned rather red; then a smile passed rapidly across his mouth.

"It's always difficult to say how much 'much' means, isn't it?" He spoke in a much lower and gentler tone than he had used when combatting Silvia's economical views, but without any return of the interest he had felt then. "But I confess I should not merely for pleasure go very far out of my way to look at a picture, would you?"

"Well, I'm afraid not. Not modern pictures, that is. Of course it's different with the pictures one sees abroad at Rome or Florence. . . ."

At this moment Mrs. Macnamara gave the signal to retire.

No sooner had Silvia reached the drawing-room than unspeakable depression fell upon her. So might some girl feel whose existence has been an obscure and monotonous one, if Cinderella-like she has been launched for one day into the midst of pleasure and gaiety, and knows that the hour is approaching for her to re-enter the dull round of her ancient life. It was an odd sensation for any one so used to society as Silvia was; but it was thus she felt.

When the door opened for the gentlemen to come into the drawing-room Silvia broke off the talk she was having with Lady Bruce and eagerly scanned the door. She saw Bertram come in; he was deep in a conversation with Vincent Macnamara. Then as they passed Miss Dalglish, Vincent said something which drew her into it. Silvia hated her at that moment. At last, yes, Mr. Bertram was moving away. He had only made three steps when he was stopped by Mrs. Macnamara. Silvia had to turn her attention to what Lady Bruce was saying—

“But now-a-days German is quite as important as French. Don't you think so?”

At this moment Sir Roper Smyth sat down beside her.

“Well, Silvia, I've hardly had a word with you, my dear,” he said, and Lady Bruce moved away. Over her godfather's shoulder Silvia heard Mrs. Macnamara say, “When are you coming to stay with us, Mr. Bertram?”

“Who's most in the running just now?” went on Sir Roper.

“What do you mean?” Silvia returned involuntarily to the bantering style of talk which she used with her godfather.

“Who do I mean? That's just what I want you to tell me? I won't let on, you know,” Sir Roper spoke in a very confidential tone. She could scarcely listen. She was in a fever of anxiety. “I hear talk,” he went on, “of young statesmen, sucking baronets, all manner of young swells. Won't do to overstay your market, you know. Of course there's Prince Eddie. But he's rather young for you. . . .”

Silvia did her best to smile. A sudden glance showed Crawford feeling for his watch. She resolutely avoided catching his eye. Woe upon it! Here was Lady Bruce come to say “good-bye.”

“Something gone wrong,” said Sir Roper to himself. “Well,”

he went on presently, "we were talking of making an expedition up the river some day to dine at Sunning Lodge" (that was a little house that Sir Roper had up the river. He had been an University oar in his day). . . . "I've had to yield to pressure and set up a steam launch."

Silvia's face brightened at this. Of course Vincent would be of the party, and who knows, perhaps . . .

Ah, all was over. Here was Crawford standing before her. At that moment Silvia hated her brother as, a while since, she had hated Miss Dalglish.

"I ordered the carriage at eleven, and it's a quarter-past now," he said. The Bruces had already gone. Alas, too, Mr. Bertram was shaking hands with Miss Dalglish. . . .

"It's rather a condescension of your brother, you know, to come at all to a family party like this," said Sir Roper. Crawford smiled back very pleasantly. "However, we must have that party at Sunning;" and as Mrs. Macnamara passed, he said—

"I've just been engaging Silvia for our river-party."

"How good of you! I was going to speak to you myself," she said to Miss Tennant. "Couldn't we arrange it now?"

Once more a faint hope rose in Silvia's breast. Mr. Bertram was still there, talking to Vincent again. Perhaps they might ask him at once.

"Come to lunch to-morrow," said Crawford, "and we can settle it then."

And that was the end. "Good-night," said Mr. Bertram very cordially, coming forward from near the fireplace where he and Vincent stood. Silvia looked brightly at him, felt the touch of his large hand, and then it was all over.

She was very silent during the drive home. And contrary to her habit, she lay awake into the earlier hours of the morning.

"Oh, I wish, I wish I hadn't said that about pictures," she said to herself as she tossed feverishly on her bed. She even cried a little.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LONDON Season is a thing commonplace enough, but like other commonplace things it has tragic possibilities. People have been killed by being run over by a donkey-cart. Nor are young *débutants* or *débutantes* the only persons for whom the season may be eventful. We pretend to be superior to that young beginner, to look at her with a sympathy which is half contemptuous. But many people who are much older are quite as self-conscious as she, are quite as vain, in whom vanity is infinitely less excusable. With her, in the rear of gratified vanity, may march many better feelings: golden love in the first place, to which she is never indifferent at heart. Even the hope of giving pleasure to her family and benefitting her brothers and sisters by a brilliant marriage, this is not a contemptible wish. But with many an elder social lion—who may be really a *débutant* or a *débutante* too—vanity has no follower. The beginning and the end are one—*vanitas vanitatum*.

Maynard and Herbert Vanlennert, whom chance had thrown together the previous September, had now since the early part of the year drifted again asunder. Of the two friends Bertie preferred Ned Bertram. Now and then he went to Maynard's for the sake of seeing Kitty, whom he felt in a manner bound to be kind to. For—for one thing—the ankle sprain of which he had been the cause proved more serious than had been anticipated, and seemed to threaten Kitty's chances of social amusement for the rest of the summer. Even without that sense of obligation, it was easy to like seeing the beautiful child, who evidently thought a great deal of him. On the whole, however, Bertie preferred meeting Kitty at Mrs. Ayntree's, whose acquaintance he had made—and Kitty's chief pleasure now was to be with Mrs. Ayntree—to meeting her at her father's.

Yet though the middle-aged painter and the young squire did not see much of each other now, there was something similar in their histories at this time. This special epoch, the season of 1883, was an eventful one for both.

For years Henry Maynard had toiled on. All that out of which he had once promised himself to make his happiness had failed him, or he had failed it. His wife was now no

more than the manageress of his household, an inconvenient manageress, whom he thought of most kindly when he thought of her the least. His children?—Art had dragged him away from his children. There were so many of them. Besides, if he could have spared time and thought enough to be a real father to such a brood, would not Mary have stepped in with her maternal jealousy and religious mania?—So he pleaded to himself. The final effort he had made to select one ewe lamb from his own flock—that he knew had been a failure too. He did not allow himself to think of the cause—the dreadful scene in the studio eighteen months ago. All he did allow himself to feel was a galling sense of Kitty's ingratitude—that she never seemed to come and meet his advances.

Well, there was Art left. And what was Art? That question, too, he never frankly asked himself. But for all that, Art was really to him a consoling mistress, gratifying the half-moral nature which belongs to the sense of beauty—to that vision of the soul of which Plato speaks.

In addition, Art was for Henry Maynard a sense of power, such as the crowd could not possess—the crowd of fashionable folk who passed him by, as if they forsooth were of consequence to the world. Art it was that righted the balance between him and Mrs. Fulgrove, the Rector's wife of Coombe Halladay, and Mrs. Captain Bywater. The envy and the revolt against the fashionable world, of which those two worthy ladies had planted the seeds in his childhood, formed a larger portion than Henry Maynard knew of his devotion to Art.

With these thoughts he had toiled on in the past years: until now at last—suddenly, as appeared to him—the door had opened, and while still almost a young man he had gained a position fairly on a level with his merits. The history of Maynard's rise and his success had not been unlike the history of most other successes. There had been—not long since, it seemed in looking back—the time when the mere admission of a picture to the walls of the Academy had been a matter for pride to him and for congratulations from his friends. Then his pictures had begun to be better hung. One or two of the established luminaries had taken notice of him, and among the first of these Churton, most generous of painters and men. Next, in spite of his large family and of the debts which were accumulating round him, Maynard found the means to join an artistic-literary club—the Hamborough, and found himself already with a certain reputation among those who knew the

difference between good work and bad. Then he met the dealer who believed in him and whose faith made it possible for him to support his family while working only at the kind of work he did best.

But still the men with established reputations—though in the case of some *how* established Heaven knew—seemed to form a class apart. They might encourage rising talent with a nod or a smile; but the idea of allowing it an equality with their own work was as far as ever from their thoughts. And if they, who really were judges, were bent on keeping things “as they were,” what chance was there that the public should ever be wiser? “After all,” Maynard began to think, “in Art as in everything else the fools are in the majority; and those who give no time to the perfecting of their work have the more time to spare for advertising themselves.” And thus he would sink back to a mere dogged perseverance at his task. Look at Baldwin that dauber, the darling of fashionable ladies. If he ever condescended to appear at the Club, he moved about like a creature of superior clay—the hair-dresser *in excelsis*, Potts, the black-and-white artist, called him: Potts who had begun life as a minor scholar of Trinity and one of the most brilliant men of his year, but whom drink and fate had finally landed as an illustrator. “At all events a very good one at that,” Maynard would say to himself. “Isn’t it better to be a good honest drunken draughtsman than such a thing of silk as Baldwin?”

All these things were matter for reflection. At the beginning of Maynard’s success they had never troubled him. Now, however, he was getting more and more in the habit of *reflection*. And reflection cannot be carried on on cold water only. Or, if it is, it runs to a clammy estimate of life. On the other hand, if a little whiskey be poured upon the flame of our thoughts they leap skyward. So Maynard found at any rate. However disappointing his day had been; however galling he began to feel the continued indifference of the public—this continued treading of the same round of hope and despair in his own work—he knew that at least some happy hours were in store for him at the end of the day.

The true joys which Art has to bestow upon its votaries, the artist discovers not in the pictures which he paints but in those which he never paints. Maynard had legions of those. Moreover, while he had no religion, properly so called, he had yet created for himself many imaginative superstitions or half-

beliefs which he could not have defended for a moment, but which he cherished as he cherished his life. One of these was that every *thought* had a vitality of its own; once created it was inextinguishable. It followed that Maynard's unpainted pictures had a veritable existence somewhere and he might be doing as much work in those hours of reflection at the end of the day as in his working daylight hours. The idea was not a mere theft from Plato. Maynard had evolved it himself, and held it firmly. It was a most soothing faith, especially suited to an artist, whose evenings are enforced times of idleness; soothing most of all to an artist with a taste for strong whiskey-and-water.

Then came the last, the decisive change. "The Cider Makers" had not been received with the cold commendation of the Press and the rather stereotyped approval of the men with a made reputation. All artistic people almost had noticed and talked about it. Little myths were current in æsthetic circles of what the members of the hanging committee had said when it was brought before them. "By God, I can paint flesh in a room against anybody. But that beggar, whoever he is, beats us all at flesh in the open air:" that was the saying mythically attributed to Churton, who of course was familiar with the picture long before the hanging committee had seen it. Then a vacancy among the Academicians falling in the autumn, Maynard was at once elected an Associate. It was the "non-suit of cow's beef," as completely as was Erskine's first big case. It would have been a moment of unmixed happiness if there had not been a warning note in the voice of the doctor whom Maynard was compelled to consult at this time. To celebrate his triumph or to distract his mind from the note of warning the new Associate went abroad. And during all those five weeks he really kept wonderfully sober and seemed a better man than he had been for years.

Still greater was the success of "The Ploughman's Following." It is not often the Academy exhibit so large a canvas, which was more on the scale of a *plein-air* picture painted for the Salon. And it is not a little to the credit of the British Public that it should have learnt to see the merits of this work which, because it was much more true to nature and therefore a great advance upon Maynard's previous work, was not in ordinary parlance near so picturesque or so taking as "The Cider Makers" of last year. A ploughman, life-size, in drab smock is bending forward at his work, though his share

is on the point of finishing its furrow. Across the left side of the picture the ploughed land rises before the eye of the spectator and ends in sharp brown ridges against a grey sky, against which the near horse too stands out statuesquely. He has but just dragged the share to the top of the hill and has there made a momentary pause. The leader is over the hill, and the bottoms of his legs are cut off. In the right-hand corner is a little patch of untouched land where knot-grass and pimpernel and miosotis and here and there a pale-blue chicory stood among the stubble. About the ploughman's feet and quite in the foreground is a small company of choughs and sea-gulls, and of the latter, one with wide wings, which seems to have that moment flown into the picture—indeed, unfavourable critics said it was not in it. Not the less is the effect of this bird very striking, and for some reason which I cannot fathom, the more impressive from its being but a few feet above the earth. No less impressive is the contrast between the grey of the sea-gulls and the windy grey of the September sky; and this sky again is reflected in a different tone, grey-blue, on the unsoiled portion of the share. The red-brown of the ploughman's hands and of his face in profile have their fellowship with the fresh turned earth, and in his face are concentrated generations of patient toil. The glossy brown of the near horse carries on the motive, which fades again in the drab smock and the glossier drab of the stubble; while the leading horse, which is pure black, seems, like the black rocks above the top of the ridge, to have taken something from the sky as the other horse something from the earth. There is (if one may say so) in this picture a reserve and a stateliness of colour as well as of form. The only exception is made by the few flowers suggested rather than given among the stubble in the right-hand corner which heighten the effect to which they contrast. A sense of the breezy height and of the largeness of Nature and her works, along with a something of loneliness and uncanniness in keeping with the presence of the sea-gulls in the scene—all this is in the picture, but must be seen to be understood.

While this work was still upon the easel the newspapers had begun to treat Maynard in a new fashion. The penny-eavesdropper was agog to pick up hints about what he was engaged upon. After Show Sunday, not only the great picture but "Ruth" and a couple of portraits were lauded to the skies. It was a great day when the first Saturday and first Monday

of May did actually come; when the Prince was instructed to make special mention of Maynard's "Ploughman," and a policeman had to stand beside the queue that fronted it. Maynard only felt a little sad that, when he did venture once or twice to the Academy, he could get no more than a glimpse at his picture, which the better part of him loved more than it loved the praise of the public. Willy-nilly he became a lion, a possible novelty for any social menu, along with Grantham the author of the great *History of the Crusades* and Amberton the comi-tragedian.

How childish these triumphs seem when summarised into a paragraph! But who can ever summarise another person's life, viewing it from the outside? Turn your glass and look at Maynard's existence during this period with the eye of the principal actor therein.

Those nights that Maynard spent over the whiskey-bottle, they were only—if you like so to call them—the steps in a career slipping deeper and deeper into drunkenness. To the actor in them they were the only moments when he passed from earth to heaven. According to all the best standards of what life should be, Maynard's was a failure. Nature had given him health and strength, leisure enough in childhood to enjoy, an unequalled sensibility to feel the beauties of Nature. An unusual share of personal beauty even was added. All these gifts had gone astray, somehow. The exquisite visions which he carried away from his childhood—and they formed by memory half the pleasure of his remaining years—were embittered at the time when he gained them by his eternal revolt against the higher powers there—the squire, the parson—still keener revolt against his mother's submission to these higher powers. Yet the very flavour of wormwood along with the taste of those boyish delights had made that taste more keen and lasting. All his romance, too, had gone. The girls of the nondescript class with whom a young artist is thrown, if he has no society but Bohemian society, shop-girls, models, these used to turn and look at him, when he was a very young man, and make shy advances. Maynard recognised now in looking back how they had done this, and saw that only his own greater shyness had prevented him from having "successes." But before he grew bold his cousin had taken him in hand. She was pretty, too, then, in her fair florid way. But had it been love that he felt for her or only gratified vanity?

or spurious romance that had endowed Mary with ideal qualities? or again mere loneliness? or the longing for power, the sense of possession? Something of each of these constituents were to be found in his first and only love. How romantic that sounded! How prosaic the reality had been! A few years of married life and all power of romantic love seemed extinguished. His paternal instincts? He never pretended to be richly endowed with them. What was left? Well, there was something left.

Once he happened to light upon some lines of Coleridge:

“ But now afflictions bow me down to earth;
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth,
But oh, each visitation
Suspends what Nature gave me at my birth,
My shaping spirit of Imagination.”

These lines he learned by heart and used to repeat them to himself with an infinite self-pity. But out of the self-pity there grew a pride as infinite. “ My shaping spirit of imagination.” Who but he would ever live to catch on canvas and make alive for evermore the wild rocking flight of sea-gulls against a dull grey sky—one human figure in the foreground, in a drenched sou'-wester bending against the wind and rain; the drenched deck? He saw it all as it were before him. Then there was the sunset over the high downs, their own blue-slatted village growing misty beneath their shadow, and sending up its incense of smoke toward heaven, one cottage window alight. Or at Chudleigh Warburton (he had once spent a summer there) the little mound close by the sea where they used to burn the refuse from the nets—he saw that flame in half a dozen different lights and with different surroundings—now shining on the red face of a fisherman who was fanning it up with his sou'-wester, while above, on the fisherman's red head itself and all around, poured down the full rays of the mid-day sun, and the blue-grey sea made a background to all; or again in evening, when the firelight was gaining a little power by the decline of the day. There was the group of fishermen unloading their nets—the light on the scales, the white light in the sky, the figures standing out strongly against the pale sand and the pale sea. Or the beautiful Devonshire girls bare-legged helping to load a cart with sea-weed, or inland binding up the sheaves of corn, or merely standing in their dark doorways in bright sunlight, or on the wet pavement of the stony village-street. He saw

these pictures as if they were before him. Who but he would ever live to paint them or such as them? There were hundreds of such pictures: some had a real or partial existence as studies, some existed in imagination only.

Thus with his third glass earthly cares were forgotten, and heaven began to open before Maynard's eyes. Keener grew his imagination. He put in detail after detail, overcoming all difficulties, as imagination does. The peculiar vividness of the sand seen through the spray of a broken wave: an orchard at sunset, with grass new-mown beneath the trees, while around the grass grew high and dark, and the pink flowers of apples and pears (always so difficult to catch aright on canvas; for imagination paints them pinker than they are) fade into the sky. The tints of autumn lanes—in Norfolk, he had two sisters-in-law living at Cromer—where the colour of the red wheat is caught again in the first changing bracken; or later when all is brown and red; or in his native Devonshire, where the red blackberry leaves stand out against the red sandstone: a girl's face shaded by a straw hat warm in reflected light; drawing-room scenes, and the interchange of lamplight and firelight; or what he had seen once in his travel abroad, a procession carrying lighted candles in broad daylight—all, all these things would he paint.

Sometimes he would take higher flights towards the heroic, towards the Raphael-Michelangelesque—something scarcely attainable within the limitations of his Art. Icarus at the moment when the first suspicion springs upon him that the wax which holds on his wings is melting; hot sunlight pouring upon him from above—his face and neck gone suddenly livid. One feather whirls peacefully on a level with his middle—No ground is visible, but his eyes show (How? Oh, tell us, Fancy!) at what a vast distance below him lies the world.

Such were Maynard's dreams in the middle hours of the night, alone in his studio. Only the pattering ashes made any sound.

He might sigh at the limitations of his art, and that all the *visions of sound* which were so present to him in the pictures he drew must be left out—all the sounds of his beloved childhood, the wind above the tors, whistling through the bent, the alternate cries of cocks in faint morning light (when Venus has not yet been extinguished); the baying of dogs in the hollow stillness of evening; and, surpassingly sweet and laden with endless memories, the murmur or the roar of the sea. He

would think how he would paint these sounds if such power could be given; nay, often after his third glass he almost had the power.

Then he awoke into the common world again. The last ember had died away. How cold and how dark and lonely the studio seemed! But not more cold and dark than life itself. Those pictures: he would never in reality paint one-tenth of them. How much longer would he have to paint at all? What had the doctor said last summer? "I won't give you . . ."

"Damn it! The damned fool of a doctor! They always try and frighten you. Two glasses was his average now—anybody could safely take two glasses of weak whiskey-and-water. . . ."

"*Weak!*" objected his conscience.

"Yes, be damned to you, they are weak. You should see what Potts drinks."

To-night perhaps he had exceeded a little. He was willing to own that three was one glass too much. "But, damn it, you should go and look at Potts," he said to his conscience once more. The people who were always bothering themselves about their health were just those who went off the hooks first. Life was short enough in any case: it wasn't worth taking any great amount of trouble to prolong it. "A little painting, a little laying of the brush in paint b-before we g-go hence and are no more seen. I'll swear there's a t-text like that. I'll w-wake up P-Polly, and ask her if there isn't a t-text l-like that. Ha-ha, I fancy her looks if I asked h-her th-that! A l-little f-folding of the brush in p-paint." He was talking out loud now. "Ha-ha-ha!" Then he got off to his bedroom—he and his wife had separate rooms now—always, as he imagined, without the least extra noise, and always being heard perfectly well by Mary.

What was confusing for Maynard was that, as it seemed, suddenly the standpoint for criticising his work had been changed, or a new standpoint been created. Hitherto his approbation of his own work had been his sole test of success. Of course it was pleasant being backed up by the approbation of some of his fellow-artists, and men with good names too. But compared with the interest they took in their own work, their interest in Maynard's was so perfunctory, that it was impossible to consider their judgment an ultimate court of appeal. During the last two years, however, all the critics, nay, all the

public, seemed to Henry Maynard to have begun to occupy themselves with his painting; and they spoke of it in such terms that one would fain believe it was a mighty concern to them. A secret voice whispered it was not so; that critics and public took just the same kind of interest in Maynard and his work that Churton and Baldwin did, only less of it. But if that voice were listened to, what was fame? It could not be that Fame was nothing, or anything less, indeed, than the seal, the only true seal, of good work. He had, he saw even now, always worked in the expectation of acquiring fame sooner or later: now it had come.

Thus it was that the whole orbit of Henry Maynard's activity began to undergo a transformation. From a circle the orbit became an ellipse with two centres of attraction, the judgment of the public and his own artistic conscience. Should these two centres of attraction ever greatly diverge, on what a parallel course might he not be bound.

He did not like to think of it. And yet unconsciously he was forever thinking of it. Those unhappy daubers Somerfield and Hayling! How they went on with their false colouring and wrong effects evolved out of their inner consciousness, without even trying to verify their work by an appeal to Nature! How could he *know* that he was not as they were? By mere persistence, by unconquerable self-conceit, they had created a sort of school, a little band of flatterers, sincere or half-sincere, mutual admiration society, an atmosphere most noxious to honest work. Could he be sure that he was not such as they? Yes, now he could be sure; for Public Opinion, which always comes right at last, had come in the end to recognise his merit. There was no better test of real success, of real lasting work. Had the favourable decree of the public come early it might have been fictitious, due to some trick of style. But now it had come late, it was safe to trust this judgment.

Thus had Maynard reached the summit of any reasonable desire. Good prices had even now freed him from debt, and as prices would become better. He had never acquired the pensive ostentatious habits which prevent many artists from enjoying benefit from the growth of their fortunes. He protested to himself that he was indifferent to what the critics said, and scanned every newspaper for notices of his work. The notices were nearly always favourable; but the thirst for praise flows by what it feeds on.

Then came invitations into the great world. To the majority

of the denizens of that Great World he appeared as a man not quite well-bred, rather hot, rather uneasy with his hands. In reality he was a soul for which two spirits were contending.

One spirit said, "Now you are among the fashionable people whom you so hated and despised in youth, with a generous hatred and lofty scorn. Or, if it was not always that, it was at least a talisman keeping you to your work and to the true fountains of inspiration. What a miserable way of spending an evening this compared to the dreams alone in your own studio!"

Then, while the voice was still speaking, his hostess, a lady with bright hair and soft eyes would move up to him.

"Have you seen our little Corot, Mr. Maynard? I'm rather proud of having got Sir John to buy it. You know his interest is not in art. Of course we can only afford very modest little pictures. But I think *you* will appreciate that," with a most flattering emphasis on the "*you*."

When they were in front of the picture—"I thought you would like it. There is always something in your pictures which reminds me so much of Corot. Not an actual likeness in your styles, but, if you can understand what I mean, something I can fancy alike in the sympathetic eyes with which you look upon Nature. I daresay I am only exposing my awful ignorance in saying such a thing. Of course I know nothing about art *really*. I only know the kind of way that pictures affect me, if you know what I mean. I can't help fancying, I don't know whether I am wrong, that you—I know that sounds very stupid and commonplace, but you will know what I mean—put a great deal of *yourself* into your pictures. Is that a very silly thing to say?"

And the dove-like eyes looked up at him in a fashion at once humble and *espiègle*, till he flushed with pleasure.

"What balderdash!" said the captious voice.

"It's not altogether balderdash!" said the other one.

Meantime, Sainton the collector and occasional art critic had come up. He was a large, burly man, some fifty years of age, with small grey whiskers.

"I hardly dare to show *you* my little Corot," said Lady Aldenborough. "I know it's of no great value. But there is something about it which appeals to me."

"Oh, yes," said Sainton, in a condescending way, "there's always a great charm about Corot. But he's unequal, very unequal. Perhaps after all he is most interesting as marking a

transition era in painting. Don't you think so?" he said to Maynard. He had only given a very casual glance at Lady Aldenborough's picture.

Maynard hesitated.

"Do explain that more to me; I should like to understand," said Lady Aldenborough.

"I don't know that there's anything to explain," replied the collector. "We, in England," he went on, "have only got as far as the Barbizon School at present. We're just beginning to discover Millet and Corot. Of course Millet is very great. He stands quite apart. But those men are not the creators of the new French School. . . ."

He spoke to Maynard, almost turning away from Lady Aldenborough, who yet looked at him very meekly with her dove-like eyes.

Maynard would have liked to hear more. He did not know much of the history of art. At the same time he had, since his visit to the Luxembourg last autumn, begun to take a great interest in the French painters, an interest all the keener that he had himself been compared to one or another of them. But he resented the cavalier way in which Sainton seemed to him to be treating his hostess.

When he got home he recalled some details of the biography of Lady Aldenborough that he had heard and not attended to. She was a lady of good family. She had been a Miss Runcorne of the same family, though some way off the main stem, as the Dukes of Flamborough. She had been only the daughter of a country parson, and had married, much to the satisfaction of her family, Aldenburg the financier. They called themselves Aldenborough now, as more English. People generally spoke of Aldenburg as a Jew, because he had a German name and was a banker. But as a matter of fact he was not, he was only a German on his father's side. He was twenty years older than his wife, who was now thirty-three.

"Poor soul!" said Maynard, as he lighted his pipe and mixed himself one glass, divining a good deal of tragedy in this simple history. What brutal manners Sainton had! But that was exactly what you saw everywhere in society; if a person was gentle, was a real lady in thought and feeling, she got sat upon, just as much as his mother got sat upon by the vulgar-minded Mrs. Fulgrove.

"No, you be damned!" he said in reply to the opposing spirit.

"I don't go out to be among swell people. But one must make friends among one's fellow-creatures, and there are real ladies to be found in all societies. If I stay at home I'm in danger of taking a drop too much. When I go out I never do." And to convince himself how much he was reformed he went to bed contented that night with his single glass.

There seemed something wonderful, too, in the fact—for all his radical principles he could not get over it—that he should be growing so friendly with the cousin—for she was a cousin—of the Duke of Flamborough. The existence of this relationship made him feel more keenly how much Lady Aldenborough must be in want of sympathy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ABOUT this time those who knew Silvia Tennant best began to notice that she was not quite like herself. Though what was at the bottom of the change they could not divine.

When the Macnamaras had come to lunch at Prince's Gate, Silvia had been so attentive to Mrs. Macnamara that the latter had, upon reflection, been quite struck by the fact. Silvia had readily accepted an invitation to lunch at Harley Street a few days afterwards. Then there was the river-party which she had supported Sir Roper in not allowing to fall through. At last Vincent's mother, who was not a prudent or reticent mother, could not help imparting some of her speculations to her son; so that Vincent felt a strange little flutter at heart, and his face became a soft pink all over when he talked to Silvia. He had felt that all possibility of strong feeling had been buried for him years ago. Still, if Fate really were going to revive the past? And Silvia was wonderfully like what Lucy had been ten years ago.

Yet it could not be said that Silvia seemed to enjoy the water-party very much after all. Vincent's friend, Mr. Bertram, was not as it chanced of the company. She managed to get up a party to go under Crawford's guidance to Maynard's studio. But that was a blank also.

One other day, however, at lunch in Harley Street, the first thing Silvia saw was the back of Mr. Bertram, who was talking to Macnamara. Vincent became inattentive after Silvia had

come into the room, and when she shook hands with him was just on the point of finding something to say, when she began the conversation point-blank.

"I suppose you were talking metaphysics," she said, smiling very graciously at both gentlemen.

"Y-yes, in a sense we were," said Vincent.

"I wish you would explain to me exactly what metaphysics is."

"A—philosophy, I should rather call it."

"Well, philosophy if you like. I thought somehow that philosophers only belonged to ancient days, before Christianity, you know."

"Oh, in a sense of course modern philosophy doesn't mean precisely the same thing as it did in those days."

"What exactly is modern philosophy, then?"

"Well, I hardly know how to explain it. How should you explain it?" and he turned to Bertram. Silvia turned her blue eyes in the same direction.

"It is rather a poser," said Bertram, in his good-natured way. "As a matter of fact philosophy only means . . . well, not taking things for granted."

"But how do you mean, what sort of things?" said Silvia.

"All sorts of things. If you think about anything you do or think you will find—at least I suspect you will find—that about three-quarters of it is what you've never thought of the reasons for, only taken for granted."

"Is it? Well I daresay you're right. But what is the special line in which you and Mr. Macnamara don't take things for granted?"

But here Mrs. Macnamara came up.

"Shall we go into luncheon? Vincent, will you take in Si—Miss Tennant?"

Silvia sat between Vincent and his friend.

"But now," she said to Bertram, "you haven't told me yet what sort of things I take for granted."

"Why, everything—that you're here in the body, for instance, and that all of us are not only part of a dream."

"Oh, that's absurd," she answered; "everybody can distinguish dreams from reality."

"No, not everybody, nor always. If you'd taken hashish, for instance, I fancy you would slip into a world of dreams quite naturally and imperceptibly. At any rate, the difference between waking reality and dreams is more a difference of degree than of kind."

"But . . . but . . ." said Silvia, reflectively, "anyhow, the dreams only come out of the waking reality as you call it."

"Yes, you're on the right track," put in Vincent.

"Thank you," she answered.

Then Bertram put in further objections until they drifted on to something like an explanation of the Berkeleian thesis. And so the conversation went on, and Silvia felt happier than she had done for a long time.

Suddenly, however, she felt as if their talk might be venturing upon sacred ground.

"Of course," she said, more gravely, "there are some things which everybody must be quite sure of . . . religion, for instance."

"A nice girl!" was Bertram's inward reflection.

After luncheon Mrs. Macnamara came up to her in rather a coaxing way.

"Dear Miss Tennant—dear Silvia, I used to call you—I am afraid we go away next Friday. Shall I see you again after this afternoon? I shall try and call on your dear mother tomorrow—that is her day, I think. . . . Do you remember that you promised to pay me a visit in Dublin and you've never done it yet, or at Ballyclare (Mrs. Macnamara had a little country house at Ballyclare, County Wicklow). Don't you think you could manage it this year after the season is over?"

"I am sure I should like it very much." She spoke with more than the conventional politeness which means a refusal; for her first thought was that possibly she might meet Mr. Bertram there. But the next moment she saw the absurdity of the notion, and she saw besides that she would not be allowed to go.

Within a week or ten days of the departure of the Macnamaras this curious little sudden infatuation of Silvia's had become a thing quite of the past, a mere dream. She felt rather ashamed of it: and yet she felt sore at the circumstances which should make her ashamed.

For the first time in her life, in truth, Silvia began to think of herself as a *femme incomprise*. Hitherto she had discovered no reason to complain of not having as good a time or better than falls to the lot of most girls. Albeit Lady Tennant was not now equal to the social efforts she had formerly made, yet had she so fully started her bark upon the sea of fashionable society that it sailed almost without guidance. And

Silvia had in addition two married sisters in two different sets, both good ones in a social sense. Her father was growing richer every year. She had as handsome an allowance for dress and pocket-money as a girl need require. Yet all these things failed to satisfy her. She had never before felt how completely unsatisfying they were. She went a good deal to see her eldest sister at this time. (Lucy Bolitho was, like Silvia, decidedly high church.) And she went much to church. She had always felt the emotions of religion a counterpoise—a soothing and amending counterpoise—to the other side of life. But beyond that they had nothing to tell her as to outside aspirations and duties. Lucy Bolitho “practised” in the same way; she was also a good deal taken up with the solid monotonous social duties which belonged to her life, as well as with three growing boys. After all, the people Silvia met at Lucy’s were even less ideal than the people whom she met at Gertrude’s, than those of her mother’s set or than the brilliant miscellaneous persons that Crawford brought to the house.

Next for a week Silvia Tennant engaged in rather a severe flirtation with M. de Camperdan, one of Crawford’s French friends, which was not at all a thing which Crawford himself approved of. He was obliged to give her a hint upon the subject, and let in a ray of light upon M. de Camperdan’s past and present history. The first time she met him after his return to London Silvia snubbed Bertie so severely that he went away quite crestfallen. And after that Silvia spent the early part of the night in tears, and sulked with all her family next day.

Then she made it up with Bertie during another morning’s ride in the Park, and he thought he had never seen her more sweet and celestial. He only did not come to the point because . . . because, as he owned to himself, he had been rather taken by surprise.

Besides, after all they met very often now. Bertie had thoroughly got into the set which Silvia frequented. There was especially one ball coming off in a week’s time that he had counted upon. It was expected to be one of the smartest things of the season.

The ball in question was given by a certain Lady St. Maurice, whose husband had been Governor of Bombay. Major Forster had once been his aide-de-camp, and it was through Mrs. Forster that Silvia and her mother got the card. Bertie got his

from the St. Ormes'. But they had told him they would not be there very early. Bertie did not expect Silvia to be there early either, but he was afraid of missing the chance: if he could secure a dance or two before her programme was filled up it would be a triumph.

Lady St. Maurice was supremely happy that her husband's term of office had come to an end; he was to return for good in the autumn. She had preceded him, and was now enjoying her first *good* season in town. She and Mrs. Forster were great allies; for Augusta St. Maurice was too good-natured and self-satisfied, too unimaginative also, to be jealous of the other's superior beauty. The class of young men who waited upon her smiles were more likely to appreciate her looks than Gertrude's—who, be it said, was not as prodigal of smiles as the Governor's wife.

Major Forster, just returned to England, had with his wife dined at the St. Maurices'. But Augusta St. Maurice had not seen very much of her friend. Now, the hostess, thinking she had done enough in that character, shook off half a dozen of her *cavalieri serventi* and took Gertrude's arm for a walk through the rooms. "It's jolly being back again in London, I can tell you, Gertrude," she said. "I do hope I shall be able to make St. Maurice stay in England. I'm sure there's plenty to do in the House of Lords if he'd only think so."

Presently they came across an old lady in a plain dress almost up to her throat, though with a sufficient display of diamonds to prevent her from looking absolutely dowdy. She was half turned away, talking to a young man on the other side of her.

"That's Lady More," Lady St. Maurice said; "I thought you knew her. Rather an old frump, isn't she? They'll miss me at Government House I guess, don't you? I gave them a right down high old time, didn't I, G.? But they can't expect to get another me."

"Oh, that's Sir Hardinge's wife, is it? He was in the Andamans you know when I was in India."

Lady More as they approached was saying to the young man beside her, "I wish very much he had lived till I returned to England, very much indeed." The young man proved to be Herbert Vanlennert.

"I want to introduce you, my dear Lady More," said Lady St. Maurice, "to my great friend, Mrs. Forster." Mrs. Forster put on her most gracious manner as she bowed.

"Very much pleased, I am sure," said the old lady, with fatigued eyes, giving Gertrude a knuckly hand in a cleaned glove. "Captain Forster served under Sir Hardinge in the Jowaki Expedition, I think."

"Yes, that was before we were married," said Gertrude.

"Then don't tell any tales about that time, my dear," said Lady St. Maurice, just touching the other's knuckles, and then taking Gertrude's arm again. And as she did this Gertrude recognised Bertie. "How do you do, Mr. Vanlennert?" she said, with not more than conventional politeness.

"What did you say to me about your sister?" Lady St. Maurice went on as they moved away. "I'll get her plenty of partners if that's all, no fear: if she wants my help; but I don't think she will. She's not so pretty as you, though, G., as you were, at any rate, not by long chalks in my opinion."

At this moment a servant came across the room to speak to her. She left Gertrude's arm and advanced a step to meet him. "Bother!" she said, coming back, "I must go back now. There's an R. H. has come."

Bertie had heard Lady St. Maurice's speech. "What did you tell me about your sister?" Any word about Silvia would have made his heart beat. And this he at once applied to himself. Mrs. Forster was colder than usual he thought—the Tenant family were not cordial to him now. Could it be that Silvia had let slip anything in sisterly confidence to Gertrude, and could it be of that that Gertrude had spoken to Lady St. Maurice, with whom she seemed to be so very friendly? It was a sign of how much Herbert Vanlennert had changed, that he should at once have applied a casual phrase about Silvia to himself and have built thereon, as he did, a whole fabric of hopes and fears. He was still too young to London society to realise that Lady St. Maurice, who had shaken hands with him most cordially when his name was called, had not recognised him again, and had no more idea than the man in the moon who he was.

Well, his first reflection was, he had entered the lists, and would fight it out to the end. If Silvia had not declared in his favour, would Mrs. Forster have been so cold? If she had, what mattered the liking or disliking of a whole army of Tenants?

Up till then he had been keeping in the background, seeking to escape introductions and keep his card clear till Silvia came. It was thus that, a quarter of an hour earlier, he had

wandered into a drawing-room chiefly occupied by chaperons. As he passed through the door an old lady said to the gentleman standing beside her—

“Dear me, that young man is wonderfully like old Mr. Vanlennert of Netley, as I remember him when I was a girl.”

“He is Mr. Vanlennert of Netley, now,” answered her companion. The lady who spoke was Lady More, and the gentleman was her cousin, Sir Tatton Brydges. “He’s grandson of the old gentleman,” Sir Tatton went on, “and son, poor fellow, of that scamp Harry Vanlennert. He’s as nice and quiet as he could be, though; not a bit like his father, and very like old Herbert.”

“How fortunate!” and she sighed slightly. “You must introduce him to me. Mr. Vanlennert used to be so kind to us girls, I remember.” And Sir Tatton brought up Herbert to be introduced to Lady More.

Lady More had been Eliza Brydges. She was the cousin of the present baronet of Long Stretton, and daughter of the last. She and her two sisters, three rather plain, distinguished-looking young ladies, had been conspicuous persons in West Derbyshire society before the time of Herbert’s birth. They always went by the name of the “heiresses,” though as a matter of fact Sir Evelyn Brydges was only a life-tenant of Long Stretton, and was not a saving man. And from the two aspects of the one fact—with some because they were not as rich as they were supposed to be, with others because they were supposed to be richer than they were—only the youngest of the three had married, and she not until she was eight-and-twenty. Some people said there had been love-passages between her and Harry Vanlennert. Captain Vanlennert was ten years older than Eliza Brydges, and had been known as a ne’er-do-well for some time before his practical disappearance from Derbyshire society. But ne’er-do-wells are not as such precluded from all favour from the opposite sex.

Eventually Miss Brydges married another officer, a dashing and ambitious Hardinge More, a man of good military connections who had now become a person of distinction. How far Hardinge More was influenced in his choice by Miss Brydges’ reputation as an heiress, how far he was eventually disappointed in this matter, what sort of married life they had had, we have not been particular to enquire. More was two

years younger than his wife and there were no children of the marriage. The husband, who in his youth had the reputation of a *viveur*, was now entirely changed. He was a strong evangelical in religion, a strict disciplinarian in his profession. His friends vaunted him as a man of unswerving justice and of a good deal of benevolence. Of Lady More's benevolence there never had been any doubt: of the strict orthodoxy of her religious views the Indian missionaries were less confident.

As soon as he could, Bertie escaped from Lady More, for he gathered from his hostess' expression that Silvia had arrived or soon would do so. He did not discover his mistress before several other young men had done so, and her card was already fairly full. As a rule, Silvia did not go down as well as Gertrude thought she ought to do. She had inherited more than her second sister of a certain *gaucherie* and shyness which came from the father. It was only to Bertie that this gave her an additional charm of which he had not fathomed the cause. Gertrude understood better what was expected of a girl in these days. "Enthusiastic distant respectful love," which Burke talks about, was not the distinguishing note in the sentiments of Silvia's other admirers. Silvia was naturally gentle and yielding. Now a certain feeling of revolt had begun to spring up in her mind against Gertrude and her standards. Of this Bertie, though he was not the cause of it, got to-night the benefit. Though she had been carrying on the usual kind of flirtation with her other partners, Silvia did feel a thrill of pleasure when she saw Bertie's keen face coming towards her, through the crowd. From his week in the country his face still kept an extra touch of healthy brown. But as a set-off to that, real work, real anxiety, above all, the wasting fever of real love, had made his face a little thinner even than its wont: while the companionship of a fine and elevated passion—for the fellowship with fine thoughts has more effect upon the looks than we suppose—added to the air of distinction which he owed to good birth and good breeding. The determination which he had taken, to face the facts of his position on every side and put his fate to the touch, had given a manly resolution to his face, and made him look more than a year older than he had looked last winter.

Herbert had made up his mind what his course was to be. He could hardly ask Silvia to marry him just as he was at this moment. But everybody in West Derbyshire believed—the

most experienced agriculturalist as well as the most ignorant—that the present depression of agriculture was soon to pass away. Bertie himself saw no special grounds for their hope; but he had not their experience: he could not be expected to set his judgment above theirs. Therefore there was no real harm in asking Silvia to wait a year or so: if she really cared for him she would do that. And if he once got her promise, it would inspire him with such unheard-of strength and resolution that he would conquer success upon one side or the other. The Tennants would not of course like it. But then he was not bound to look at things from their point of view. In fine, it was ridiculous, he decided, for one whose forefathers had fought for their king and their country, and had held their heads high in the world for a couple of hundred years, to strike his colours before a lot of cock-tails, such as those by whom Silvia was surrounded. (Percy Glenbyre, who counted Macbeth among his ancestors, and Gilbert Reid, of an old Anglo-Saxon stock that had held property in Derbyshire before the Conquest, were included in this category.) “Who were the Tennants themselves, after all?” Such had been the effect of the return to his native soil, the breaths of country air which Bertie had drawn while at Gretton.

Even if it should be more than two years that they waited, was his last thought as he looked at Silvia’s fair face, even that beside his utter devotion to her was no superhuman sacrifice to ask; and then came into his mind some beautiful words—read once by chance—of Swift in speaking of Hester Johnson—

“Time takes something from the beauty of form and feature in any other eyes but mine.”

“Can you give me a dance?”

“With pleasure;” she looked at her card as she handed it. “I am afraid I am engaged up to number ten.”

“Number twelve is the last before supper. May I have that and take you in afterwards?”

Silvia looked up surprised and secretly pleased at a certain hardness of manner in him.

“I am afraid I am engaged for the first extra.”

“Well, I suppose there is no chance of getting supper till after the second extra. Couldn’t you give me that too?”

“How disgusted Gertrude will be with me!” thought Silvia. “But I shall dance with whom I choose.” She felt a moral support from Bertie’s more courageous attitude. So she nodded with a smile, “I hope he won’t think too much of that

though, poor boy," she said to herself when Bertie had given back the card. . . .

"What do I feel like?" Silvia said to herself, as later in the evening she was whirling round the room with Bertie. "What do I feel like when he is holding me? Love? Poor boy, how he loves me!" she went on, changing the issue. For Bertie had suddenly turned to speak to her, and before her eyes his had fallen with a trembling of the lids. "How I notice everything to-night! . . . Certainly I am changed. . . . But is it that I am in love? . . . I suppose no one ever does get very much in love till she's married. . . . And fancy the horror of becoming an old maid. . . . Certainly it is Bertie and not Percy. Certainly not, least of all, Captain Haythrup. . . ." Then suddenly a vision of that Mr. Bertram passed before her eyes. "How odd!" Silvia blushed. . . . "But of course that is ridiculous. . . . A man of forty, and not the least bit in society either. . . ." After all, there was no hurry really in deciding. . . . Gertrude was a nuisance bothering her.

"How long do you stay in town?" said her partner.

"Oh, I suppose only a month more."

"And do you go to Netley then?"

"No, I think not. At least if we do it will be only mama and me. Gertrude and her husband are going to Scotland."

A look of great eagerness and longing came into Bertie's face: and this Silvia with her added quickness of vision did not miss. "Shall we sit down here a minute," she said, sliding her arm out of his and turning towards a seat in the window.

"I was at Netley the other day—at Gretton, that is, I mean," said Bertie.

"Oh, were you? How is your uncle and Mrs. Vanlennert and dear Molly? I wrote to her the other day." (It was a month since. But that is no matter.)

"Very flourishing, thanks. The country looks most beautiful. It really seems a pity to be in London at this time of year."

"Yes. Doesn't it? I often wonder why we consent to be deprived of the country all the spring and early summer. I can imagine how beautiful Netley must look. I suppose the woods are full of flowers."

"Yes. Last week they were simply blue with hyacinths. Now they are beginning to get pink with that pink flower, campion it's called, I think. I am most awfully fond of those woods. I remember . . ."

"You must be. Do you know I always feel as if we were usurpers who . . ." Silvia stopped. She had now heard of Bertie's serious embarrassments and she felt guilty.

"Had turned me out? Well, I'm very glad you did turn me out."

"Glad, why?"

"Because if you had not I should never have seen you perhaps." He had been nearly burking the phrase and saying "had the pleasure of seeing you." But he resolutely stuck to his guns this time. There was a slight shake in his voice, but he looked at his companion's face.

Silvia was looking down. She saw Bertie's hand and that it was trembling. There was something wonderfully affecting in the sight, not less so because her thought was not, "How I love him!" but, "How he loves me!" "Do I deserve it?" she thought to herself; "where shall I find . . ." She looked into her companion's face for one moment. Then she trembled and a terror seized her, she distrusted her instinct.

"W-we're losing all the dance," she said, getting up.

Bertie too got up. But he nerved himself not to be driven off his purpose. "You know, don't you," he said gravely, as they moved round, "that that's of much more importance to me than Netley itself and all that belongs to it?"

Silvia did not reply. Bertie wisely deemed that he had said enough for the moment. But it was a dance full of electrical emotions for both of them. "If we were in a room alone and he were to kiss me now I could not resist," Silvia thought, and she half wished that that could be the end. After all, she had no real sympathy at home. To find one faithful and manly heart on which she could rest her forehead . . . and cry . . . She felt very much inclined to cry for one moment.

But they were not in a room by themselves, and in two minutes more the dance came to an end. "Thanks," said Silvia, "here's my sister, I think I'll stop here."

"One gets *tête-montée* in a ball-room," she said to herself. But she resented, too, Gertrude's look, which had a sarcasm in it as plainly as if it had been said in words.

"But you said I might have No. 2 extra," Bertie said, as he stopped, "and take you in to supper."

"Very well, then," said Silvia.

Why is it necessary for us to be constantly making up our minds? or being necessary, why does our decision often hang upon such a trifle? Yet the history of a life may be involved in it.

Silvia vaguely made some such reflections when supper was over. She felt rather like a truant child who has escaped from school, but now that he is free scarcely knows what to do with his time. Her only strong feeling was a great deal of pity for herself: nobody really thought about her *happiness*: only about her making a brilliant marriage. Well, then, she would play truant, she would take her future in her own hands. But now she had resumed her full freedom of choice, what was she going to do with that liberty? That was the question. If only Bertie had been distinctly handsome, she thought, or brilliantly clever, or even—this was scarcely a recognised thought—if he could have then and there laid Netley at her feet.

Nevertheless she *liked* him; that was a great thing. They got on very well during supper; even the coolest heads are a little affected by supper. As they came out of the room—

“I suppose we must go up-stairs now,” said Bertie, wistfully.

“Yes. Dear me, how pretty those lights look over there!”

“What are they?” said her companion, and without asking further questions he turned sideways towards the light, which came from a long narrow conservatory (covered way rather) behind the stairs, where shone festoons and flowers of electric light in coloured glasses.

“How lovely!” said Silvia, as she went in. “I’ve not been here before.” Electric light was then quite a novelty. A white dress or two gleamed in the half light, and she could hear a murmur of voices, enough to let her say to herself, “It’s quite safe in here.” She knew that the third extra for which she was engaged to Percy must be on now, and she felt more than ever indisposed to do as she was bid.

Bertie took her as far as he could. There were two chairs vacant. “We may as well sit here a moment,” he said. Then a couple who were close to them rose to go. “It’s like the exhibition, isn’t it?” he went on, not knowing what he said. (“These precious moments may pass and never come again,” spake a voice. Another answered, “Better not hurry things.”) “But it’s all artificial, not like the country after all,” he continued, without any more reason.

“Still, one could not live in the country all the year round,” said Silvia, also for the sake of saying something. Then there was half a minute’s silence.

“After all,” said Bertie, “it doesn’t matter where one lives,” and he tried to steady his voice, “as whom one lives with.”

And once again the slight tremble sent a wave of pity through Silvia.

"Were you very fond of your grandfather?" she said, in a softened voice. But the next moment she had to bite her lip to prevent herself from laughing. "His grandfather—his grandmother!" How had she said anything so ridiculous! She bit her lip till the tears came into her eyes.

"I wasn't thinking about anything of that sort," said Bertie. "I meant that the country—Netley, for instance—would be a Paradise or . . . just the opposite . . . according to whether anyone . . . one . . . cared for . . . lived there or not."

Now at this point Silvia might have said, "Oh, I think Netley's a charming place. Shall we go up-stairs now?" She even had that answer at the tip of her tongue. But the tears were still in her eyes, and though they had been originally tears of laughter she was not sure what sort of tears they were now. So she did not answer immediately.

Then Bertie venturing to look more steadily at her thought he discerned these tears in her eyes. At once his heart was filled with such unutterable devotion that he forgot his timidity and indeed himself altogether.

"You know, Miss Tennant . . ." he went on, "I know it's awful- . . ." ("cheek" he nearly said but checked himself) "ly conceited of me to hope . . . useless perhaps my saying it. But you must know what would make Netley a paradise to me, and . . . without which I shouldn't care to live there or anywhere else. . . ."

Bertie began to feel his courage growing, Silvia felt proportionately less at ease. There are those who maintain that when two people are together they have a common stock of moral *vis viva* or kinetic energy, and that what one gains another loses.

"I—I think we ought to be going back," Silvia whispered.

"Not yet. You must hear what I have to say. I came here to-night meaning to tell you"—and here his voice trembled again—"how much I love you and to ask if it was any good. . . ."

"Oh, Mr. Vanlennert, I don't know what to answer."

"Oh, you will give me some hope. I don't know what I shall do if you take away all my hopes."

"I don't want to do that—if—you really care."

"If I care. Oh, I can't tell you how much I love you! I worship the ground you tread upon. I can hardly believe that

you can ever . . . care for . . . me. But I am sure you will never in your life find anyone who loves you so much as I do."

Then Silvia lifted her eyes shyly to his. (That is true, she thought. Percy *could* not speak like that or look like that.) "You are very good," she said, in a low, half-penitent voice. It was a strangely inconsequent thing to say. But the tone in which words are spoken are of more consequence than the words themselves.

"And you will give me some hope?" Bertie took her hand; she did not draw it away, nay, perhaps she returned his pressure the least bit. "You will say that I may hope?" he said, bending over her.

"Yes," she said, in a low voice, with her head down.

They were alone in the conservatory now. "And you think that . . . that some day you might love me a little bit?" Bertie's lips were very near hers now.

"Yes." As she said this Silvia raised her head. He hardly dared to kiss her. But his courage whispered it must be now or never. As it was the kiss only fell upon her cheek. Silvia drew back her head.

"Forgive me. I could not help it. I do love you so very much." He still held her hand.

"I think you had better take me back, please," was all Silvia said.

"Yes," said Bertie, with a sigh.

"I know that Mrs. Forster does not like me much . . ." he began suddenly.

"Oh, indeed she does, Mr. Van——"

"Oh, don't, Silvia!"

"Yes, I must. I couldn't call you anything else to-night."

"She would say perhaps that I had no right to speak to you as I have done till my property is all put right, disencumbered and that——"

"I am sure that would not make any difference."

"It will be soon. Everybody, Wheatley and everybody says so at least. Of course not any difference to you. . . . I did not expect you to promise me all at once. . . . But if you will not say 'No' . . ."

"I haven't," she said.

She felt that she had in truth promised. "I do love him," she said to herself. "But I should like to love him more before I made up my mind."

CHAPTER XIX.

AT that ball at Lady St. Maurice's Gertrude saw things which seemed like a nightmare. She saw Silvia coming back into the ball-room after being down-stairs—she did not know how long or with whom—but now most certainly upon the arm of young Vanlennert, with a flush on her face and a strange soft look in her eyes. Percy Glenbyre was talking very smartly to her, Gertrude, at the moment. Then she saw Silvia's and Bertie Vanlennert's farewell, with a look in the latter's face which there was no mistaking. Percy turned round as Silvia came up, and only said, "I'm afraid I've missed my dance, I'm unlucky," and went on talking to his cousin. Gertrude herself resented this on Silvia's account. She was not going to stand rudeness to her sister, even from Percy. So she turned without much ceremony to speak to Silvia. The next moment Percy too was gone.

"I'm tired," said Silvia, "can't we go home?" She was to drop Mrs. Forster in Lowndes Square at Lady Anne's house where Gertrude and her husband were staying: Frank had gone home hours ago.

"It was a regular nightmare!" Gertrude said so to herself as they drove away from Grosvenor Square. She had too much sense and dignity to ask her sister to explain. But she felt more cross with the latter than she could say. This ball itself was in a certain way a social promotion for Silvia: had Mrs. Forster been in India she would never have got a card for it. Gertrude had had some hopes that Percy would make this ball the occasion for "coming forward" definitely. And now to see Silvia on the best of terms with that boy from Gretton (Gertrude chose to think of Bertie in that way) and apparently to have thrown Percy over for the sake of young Vanlennert. ("He'd not the least business to be so rude certainly," Gertrude said, indignantly.) But what could it all mean? It was pure delirious absurdity.

Yet, amid all her speculations, Gertrude stopped far short of the fact—that Silvia had as good as engaged herself to Herbert. *That* she would not have believed within the bounds of possibility.

Vanlennert's thoughts that night and the following day were a very different vein. "Is it possible," he said to himself, "that what might be the dream of a lifetime, the reward of a century of endeavour, is being vouchsafed to me now? After only six months. What have I done to deserve such good fortune? How could I have had the audacity to ask it in the way I did? But she *has* accepted me: that's the wonderful part. And after all there can't be anyone who loves her one-ninth as much as I do. I shall . . ." He could find no words to express the pictures which rose up in his mind of all the ways in which he would express his devotion to Silvia, of how he would expend his whole life in making her happy. And he began to feel as if he had already a husband's privileges—not from any sensual point of view; his love was so entirely romantic that that was shut out—but as if Silvia had laid aside for him of the august panoply of her virginity for him. He saw her chiefly in the panoply of company dress: he began to think of her in the *déshabillé* of ordinary life. It was too good to be true! And yet it was true.

He would not relax his efforts one bit—Lawes had liked that last review he sent in—and until the affairs of his estate got right . . . After all, he reflected, Gilbert Reid, though he would one day succeed to the Burton Pynsent estate, was making a good fortune on the Stock Exchange, and Percy Glenbyre was a way of being a distinguished man without asking for help from Lord Glowry. Compared with that the twelve or fourteen pounds that he had earned from the *Piccadilly* did not seem a great achievement. Well, if he had not done much, he would do more. It was all the more gracious of Silvia to choose him with his slender claims. All the more would he repay her by a life-long love. Only, now he came to think of it, he could not understand how he had summoned up courage to speak and to do as he had done.

The conclusion he came to was that it was Heaven's doing, and that he and Silvia were made for each other. An ecstatic thought.

And then think of Reid and Laycock, and Glenbyre—how utterly unworthy *they* were.

A week or so after Lady St. Maurice's dance, Lady Tennant came to see her daughter Gertrude in Lowndes Square. In her mother-in-law's house Gertrude had a little sitting-room set apart for her own use, and into that Lady Tennant was shown to-day.

"Oh, dear mama, how are you?" Gertrude jumped up to kiss her mother. "How good of you to come and see me on such a disgustingly hot day!"

"Give me some tea, dear, will you?" Lady Tennant sank back into a deep easy-chair. Her face looked very pale and very full of lines. She submitted to the kiss rather than returned it. She always seemed too fatigued for anything like demonstrative affection. Howbeit she kept hold of Gertrude's hand in a graceful manner as she sat down. "How are Franky and Baby?"

"Baby's not very well, I'm sorry to say. She has 'a most dreadful rash that makes her look frightful. The doctor says it's only the heat and her teeth beginning. But I suppose you'd like to see her. . . . Bring tea, please," she said to the man when he appeared. "Are the children in yet?"

"Not yet, I think, madam."

"When Bridges comes in tell her I want the children to come down to me as soon as she has taken their things off."

"Yes, madam."

For a while the conversation ranged round the health of the children. Presently Lady Tennant set down her cup.

"Some more tea, mama?"

"A little, please. . . . I'm not quite easy about Silvia," she went on, as Mrs. Forster turned back to the tea-table.

"No?" said her daughter, with her back still turned.

"Haven't you noticed anything different in her yourself?"

"Well, yes, I think I have."

"You've no idea what's the cause?"

"Have you?"

"My dear Gertrude, why do you go on talking to me like a witness in a law-court?"

Gertrude sat down opposite her mother and laughed a very slight laugh.

"To tell you the truth, I don't like to think what the cause may be. Silvia is really too silly for anything! I could almost believe that she's trying to fancy herself in love with that stupid boy, Bertie Vanlennert."

"With Mr. Vanlennert? But what does she know of him?"

"That's just the ridiculous part, isn't it?" broke in Gertrude.

"I did notice certainly," Lady Tennant went on in a musing way, "that he was very attentive to her the other night at Orme House. Let me see, we asked him to our dance in April, didn't we? and he's called once or twice, and I dare say he's—

oh, yes, he dined with us once, and I dare say he's been to lunch. But surely she can't have seen him more than half a dozen times!"

"Oh, yes, more than *that*. She saw him more than half a dozen times last Christmas when we were at Netley and . . ."

"To be sure. I forgot that for a moment. But he's a mere *boy*. I remember at tea there his telling us some story about something which happened to him abroad and the way he pronounced some French words. Crawford had just arrived; he was a good deal amused, I remember. . . . I thought him rather a gentlemanly boy. . . . I can't think that Silvia's really thinking of him. . . . Even if he were the owner of Netley, I can't say that I think it would be a marriage which one would consider desirable; and as it is, it is quite out of the question."

"Of course it's out of the question. Silvia, I have no doubt, knows that as well as anybody. But it's just because of that that she has a sort of hankering after it."

"Well, at any rate, it cannot be any serious matter."

"Yes, it can. Because, you see it keeps other people off."

"Yes, true: it might. It's really very silly of her. But girls are so silly. I don't know that it would be wise to interfere."

"No. But I shall be glad on the whole when the season comes to an end. I can quite imagine her refusing some really nice man. Percy, for instance, if he asked her just now. And that would be a serious matter. You see it's her fifth season."

"Do you think I *ought* to speak to her, then?"

"No, dear, I don't. But how would it be if we contrived to cut the season short? If you could go off to Homburg or somewhere . . ."

"Now? There won't be a soul there, and the place will be like an oven. . . . Still," Lady Tennant went on, after a pause, "I would go if you thought it really desirable."

"You are so good, dearest mother. I *do* think it desirable. Though I made light of it at first, I can quite imagine some misfortune happening." Mrs. Forster got up and kissed her mother. In her eyes the proposed proceeding appeared in the light of an act of real self-sacrifice. Gertrude loved her mother better than did either of the two other daughters. Her love-affairs had sailed smoothly into prosperous waters, and had received nothing but approval and assistance from Lady Tennant. Other mothers might have objected to the histories told of Captain Forster's past. And as Frank Forster had verified an old proverb and the marriage had turned out well, Lady Tennant's

conduct had been justified in her own eyes and rewarded by the continued affection of her second daughter.

"One can never reckon upon Percy," Gertrude went on. "But you know he doesn't care for sport of any kind, and he is as likely to go to Homburg or some such place as anywhere. And when he hears that Silvia is there, if he really cares for her, no doubt he *will* go as soon as Parliament rises."

"Well, I'll see how soon I can . . ."

"Come in," cried Mrs. Forster, for at that moment the door handle was turned and the door was pushed gently open. "Come in, my darlings, and see granny."

The Saturday following this visit—as Fate would have it—Herbert Vanlennert went out of town to stay three days with Alleyne, who had taken a lodging at Whitchurch. It was blazing hot, but in the evening cool shadows fell upon the river, and as they rowed and drifted beside the woody banks and under the great bridge, Bertie felt the fever of his passion somewhat cooled—and that a few days' absence from London, even absence from Silvia's neighbourhood, would do him good. He did most of the sculling that evening, for Alleyne had a headache and was generally below the mark. As they strolled home after dark and stayed for a moment on the long wooden bridge, a white owl passed them as noiselessly as a ghost.

The next day to his headache Alleyne had added a sore throat, and the doctor, when he was at last called in, pronounced it scarlet fever. Bertie stayed to nurse him, but wrote off to his relations. He was free to return to town on Wednesday night. But the doctor advised him to keep quarantine for a week. He was so scrupulous that he did not answer a note of invitation from Gertrude Forster, for he knew that she had children. He telegraphed, "Have been with friend ill; advised to keep quarantine till Wednesday." He hoped at any rate he would win his way to Gertrude's good graces by his consideration.

Not till the Thursday following—to make assurance doubly sure—did he call on her. The first thing she said as he appeared at the door of the drawing-room was—

"My dear Mr. Vanlennert, are you sure you are quite safe? You know I have children up-stairs."

"The doctor says I am perfectly safe," said Bertie, turning rather red. He now saw that an older lady was also in the room. She, too, looked somewhat shocked and surprised. "But if you'd rather, I won't stay. . . ."

"I daresay I'm very foolish, and I know I'm very rude. This is my mother, Lady Anne Forster, Mr. Vanlennert." Lady Anne bowed, but had a slightly alarmed expression, as if an introduction brought the infection, whatever it was, one step nearer. Herbert was only just inside the door; nobody had even shaken hands with him.

"But if you will forgive me," Mrs. Forster was going on, "I would rather . . . You know how silly mothers are, and you will forgive me, I know."

"I'm very sorry," Bertie said. He wanted to find out whether he should have to keep away from Prince's Gate too. "I should not have come, only the doctor gave me a perfectly clean bill."

"I know, I know. It's unreasonable folly. I can't excuse it. I can only ask you to forgive me."

He had gone some few steps down the stairs; Gertrude followed him at a safe distance.

"Perhaps I'd better not call at Prince's Gate, then, just yet?"

"They're gone. You would not find anybody there, except possibly Crawford. My mother has been ordered abroad." ("He's not likely to be able to go to Homburg; but there's no use telling him," Gertrude thought.)

"Gone!" The very air was darkened. Bertie's face assumed so blank an expression that Gertrude could really have found leisure to pity him if she had not been on pins and needles lest the children should come in and he should encounter them in the hall. "Gone altogether, do you mean?"

"Yes. They've left town for the season. We shall be leaving in a week or so. So I suppose will you, shan't you? But no doubt we shall meet again soon. Very likely at Netley. . . . Good-bye, good-bye. You will forgive me for my rudeness, won't you?" and Mrs. Forster nodded and smiled with all the grace she could command. Bertie stared at her for a moment as if he would have liked to ask more, then walked disconsolately down-stairs. The servant stood waiting at the door.

"Thank goodness, he's gone. What a stupid blundering boy he is!" was all the pity he got from Gertrude when the hall door had closed upon him.

All London had become dark. But there was no ground for blank despair. That evening he was greatly cheered by getting a note from Silvia herself. She had been so sorry to leave London without saying good-bye. But she heard that he was in the country nursing a sick friend. . . . They were now just installed in the Hotel Victoria at Homburg . . . she hoped for

only a month. Then most likely she supposed they would go to Netley. "You must make them ask you to Gretton then." There was not much in the letter, but it was very sweet and friendly. If only he could get there! But the most sanguine of lovers must recognise that it is impossible to eat a cake and have a cake. The stableman's bill, his tailor's bill, the cost of hansom to take him to parties, of flowers for his buttonhole, of flowers for Silvia, had made a liberal hole in Bertie's finances. The accounts to midsummer which he had just received from his agent were gloomy enough. There was foot and mouth disease about—Hinks was ruined by it. The price of wool had not gone up, contrary to what every one had anticipated. ("But on what earthly grounds?" thought Bertie. When he had heard these matters discussed after dinner at the Orchers' table the wildest hopes were indulged in, even by people like Captain Bambury—as to the possibility of a tariff on foreign wool, etc.) "I am sorry," said Wheatley, "you decided to keep Hinks on." The agent ended by proposing, in the most liberal way, that one-half of his salary should be credited to him till things were a little more straight. Confound it! Bertie thought that offer tied his hands still more with regard to Wheatley—who was certainly one of the best chaps in the world.

And when he got to this point Bertie jumped up from his seat and walked about the room in a state almost of fury and despair. Why had the aspect of everything changed as it had almost in a moment? All his past life seemed to rush back upon him. He saw himself indulged and made much of by everybody at Netley as the future squire. He remembered having his first pony and his first riding lessons—from this same Wheatley—his first fishing-rod, his first gun. The days on which he used to sit fishing by the ponds unconsciously drinking in, as he realised now, the sights and sounds of nature all about him, the thrush that was singing on a branch hard by, the blue-bells in the long grass, a seed vessel from the limes which came whirling, whirling through the air till it alighted on the solid-looking surface of the pool. He thought of the September mornings when he had gone shooting—of the clear and ringing air, of the cobwebs on the gorse: of all the days of hunting he had had down to that celebrated meet last winter. Those pictures passed through him like lightning. And now without any wrong-doing on his part, without a word of warning as it seemed, it was to be his fate to be eternally breaking his head against a stone wall of dreary accounts which nothing

emed to put right, and yet which must be put right quickly he was lost. Oh, God! It wasn't fair! It wasn't fair! It was as a torture as of Sisyphus that had been laid upon him—to unloose a Gordian knot with his hands tied behind him.

Was there any use in staying in London and trying to earn money there? What chance was there really? Thirteen pounds and ten shillings from March to July, and he must make a fortune at once or perish in the attempt. Visions of Percy Lenbyre and his self-satisfied smile, of Gilbert Reid's grand solemnity, of Laycock's extreme smartness of attire, came before him like mocking spirits. He was as clever as they at the bottom. But he hadn't had a chance. Wheatley, Uncle George, leaning the best for him—his grandfather, too, for that matter—had tied his hands. It wasn't fair.

Never had he been in a state more nearly bordering on hysteria. Nothing seemed hopeful. Silvia herself had receded to an almost indefinite distance.

All he could do was to pull himself together by a violent effort of will. At all events it could do no good to cry out in that way. He would make himself work hard at law for one thing as long as he remained in town. Then he would go down to Gretton, and not leave till he had found the best solution possible. If he sold half his estate and gained Silvia would not that sacrifice—heavy as it seemed—be really light? Ah, yes, if he gained Silvia everything would be light. And he took out her letter to read again. But, alas! he was in a dunghood, and even the letter failed to call her living image before him.

CHAPTER XX.

At last to gain some relief Bertie Vanlennert set out for a long walk. He found himself to the north of Oxford Street; therefore he determined to go on to Wimpole Street. He must, he thought, see some friendly face. He thought vaguely of Mrs. Ayntree as representing that idea, though it was actually Kitty Maynard whom he pictured himself meeting there.

Kitty had no direct part in the world into which her father had lately entered, and her little entry into social life which had been made at the Churtons' was checked by the accident which followed it. For Kitty had been laid up for a fortnight.

But not the less did the change in his life involve a change in hers also. She was a child whom anyone might have been glad to take up. But people—English people—never do take up the children of obscure persons for the sake of their personal attractiveness, their beauty, or their talent. Mrs. Ayntree herself was perhaps no exception to the rule. But being what she was, the daughter of a great artist, and herself a work of Nature of the most enchanting character (so Mrs. Ayntree expressed it), Kitty had excited in the mind of her new friend an enthusiasm which amounted for the present time to veritable infatuation.

Mrs. Ayntree's husband was something more than a mere medical practitioner. He was an F.R.S., a demonstrator of Anatomy at University College and assistant surgeon at St. Thomas's. When old Hambridge should die he had every expectation of succeeding him in the chair of Anatomy at the Royal Academy. Ayntree's father was likewise a scientific man of eminence, a Fellow of the Royal Society of long standing. In creed Ayntree and his wife were blank atheists—though of course they described themselves by the fashionable name of agnostics. They did not force their views upon everyone—not overmuch, that is—but they made no concealment of them. The first time that Kitty heard "A. G." referred to in facetious-sarcastic tones she wondered what was meant: when she found out that the initials stood for Almighty God she expected the house to be struck by lightning. But the house did not fall, and proportionately with its stability her own beliefs were shaken. They had long ceased to be much more than superstitions. But she kept her beliefs and disbeliefs to herself.

Mrs. Ayntree was amazed, not precisely at the shyness but at the reserve of the child, so different from what might have been expected in the member of a large family. When she heard more of the household she laid all the blame of this on Mrs. Maynard.

"I have the greatest difficulty in not telling the poor child that her mother is an old fetish-worshipper," she said to her husband. "One good thing is I don't think her creed has made much impression on Kitty."

Mr. Ayntree was an excellent man but a dull: one of those innocent uneventful lives which devotion to science seems to create, lives in whose history all that is outside the chief pursuit, marriage, fatherhood, even loss of friends or children,

seem to come as episodes not connected with the main plot. I do not mean that he was one of those persons who can talk nothing but shop. He rather prided himself on his general interest in human affairs, by which he understood theatres, books, politics—as the word is understood by the newspapers—on all of which he was ready with perfect modesty of manner to give a fluent unbiassed opinion—such an opinion as Gulliver might have pronounced upon the affairs of Liliput. He thought a great deal of the virtue of truthfulness, and spoke sometimes of that of courage—of moral courage he had a fair share, his education had encouraged its growth, and his life had been too sheltered for him to make proof of his physical courage. But to any other workings of the moral sense no allusion was ever made in that household: so far as could be gathered there, they might have no existence. Ayntree was full of good intuitions and kindness of heart. He lived in rather a narrow set of people more or less distinguished in themselves or their relations, who shared his own views. Most of them were well-to-do. There were not, therefore, any money calls on his generosity: but he readily met all that were made. The constant sense of good fellowship which exists in smallish cliques—especially such as are the mark for a good deal of mean prejudice outside—tended towards a liberal allowance of mutual admiration among Ayntree and his friends. Altogether it was a very happy and friendly circle.

If the members of it were ever confronted by the fact of people apparently devoting their whole existence to the benefit of their fellow-creatures, they decided that this was a form of superstition and designed to secure a good place in the next world: so without any prick of conscience, they passed by on the other side. When people had no vocation for science—which was the only thing which could permanently benefit mankind—Ayntree thought that they had a perfect right to amuse themselves to the fullest extent possible in their lives; and this liberty he amply extended to his wife. He was, in fact, as the latter often repeated with emphasis to her friends, “a perfect thing in husbands”—“only a trifle dull,” she might have added, but never did, even to herself.

She thought herself very much in love with her husband. It was, as has been hinted, rather the custom of the set to which she belonged to make a great display of marital affection—to “spoon,” as the vulgar would say, in public. They had a certain belief that they had re-discovered and rescued this

sentiment which ages of superstition and "devil-worship" had tended to cast into the shade. Mr. Ayntree and his wife were much given to sitting in public—the public, that is, of their near acquaintance—hand in hand. Howbeit Mrs. Ayntree still required a further vent for her emotions, and she was addicted to the little enthusiasms of friendship, such as that with which Kitty had inspired her.

She did not venture more often than she could help into the den of the fetish-worshipper—as she called Mrs. Maynard's house. But she waylaid Mr. Maynard at parties and got him to bring his daughter round, until the intimacy grew ripe and she obtained a sort of general leave from the father to take Kitty out as often as she pleased.

Wonderful and delightful to Kitty were the expeditions she and her friend made together—in the afternoons generally—to picture-galleries, to concerts, to the pits of theatres, and then to afternoon tea at all manner of coffee and bun shops. Kitty could not have believed that London contained so many sources of enjoyment. The whole nature of the child expanded like a flower in sunshine under this genial treatment. Now-a-days in this month of July she was at certain times of the day to be found more often in Wimpole Street than in Agneta Road.

And Mrs. Ayntree by skill and perseverance had managed to get hold of Mr. Vanlennert also. That she reckoned as her crowning achievement. Bertie did not know why he came; but from time to time he did come. He did not realise in the least that Kitty was the attraction. What on earth *should* he want to see a child like that for? They were on very good terms—so he supposed at least—but what could she be to him, or he to her? So he thought of the matter, not realising how attractive beauty is, even in children, and how restful a thing it is likewise whenever it is altogether removed from the desire of possession and so from all touch of jealousy or of fear.

It was this anticipation of rest which without his consciousness had directed Herbert's footsteps towards Wimpole Street on the afternoon in question. He could not have gone to one of the houses which Silvia was wont to frequent.

No other visitor was there. The woman and the girl exchanged one quick glance when Mr. Vanlennert's name was announced. For Mrs. Ayntree was quite in Kitty's confidence about Bertie. The theory that girls are to consider love as remote and heavenly possibility not even to be talked of

without some impeachment of their modesty was no part of her creed: it was relegated to the place of other old superstitions.

For some time the talk—between Mrs. Ayntree and Bertie—was commonplace enough. But as the latter was drinking his tea he took up a journal whose object was to advocate what are called Women's Rights.

"Oh, I say, do you go in for this?" he said. Hitherto he had been rather struck with Mrs. Ayntree's sense and logical faculty.

"For what? What is it?" said his hostess, who was short-sighted, screwing up her eyes.

"'Iris' it's called. I know a lady, Miss Fisher, who's tremendously . . ."

"Violet Fisher. Yes, I know her very well."

"Oh, yes," put in Kitty, "Ionë Churton often talks about her."

"Which of them is that?" said Bertie.

"Ionë; oh, Ionë is a friend of mine," said Kitty, blushing, "rather a friend, that is . . ."

"Of course I go in for giving greater freedom to women, Mr. Vanlennert, if that's what you mean by *that*. We've had enough of being the slaves of men," said Mrs. Ayntree.

"But that's bosh, you know, 'the slaves of men,'" said the other. Fancy his ever making Silvia his slave! His eyes softened at the thought.

"Half the women are that at present," said Mrs. Ayntree, "though you gild their chains I daresay. I'm not speaking only of married women. Look at all the unfortunate old maids who are considered to be doing no more than their duty in shaping themselves to suit all the unreasonable caprices of an old father or an old mother. . . ."

"But what would you have them to do? They couldn't leave their father or mother alone."

"Why couldn't they? That's just like a man. Why shouldn't their brothers take a turn at looking after them?"

"Because their brothers have families of their own, most likely. Anyway, they have their bread to earn."

"Let the unfortunate women be trained to earn their bread too. They would be much happier. It's just what I said: you think it is the duty of women to make themselves slaves to someone—to their husbands if they can get them, if not, to their parents or even their brothers."

"Yes. That sounds all right. But you never could have women really filling the places of men except in a comic opera and . . ."

"How do you know that? You're such a thorough-going Tory, Mr. Vanlennert. You think that whatever has been always must be."

"Well, there is such a thing as nature and what is natural to people. . . ."

"Most of what you call nature is just old-fashioned prejudice, nothing more. That's what we're going to do away with. Let us, at any rate, give women a chance, and see what they can do. I daresay you have no idea how many of the occupations of men they fulfil in the United States, for instance—that all the schools nearly are kept by women. . . ."

Mrs. Ayntree went on to enlarge upon this point. But Bertie's attention became distracted. His mind was filled with romantic thoughts: all this seemed utterly meaningless. There might be some few women to whom Mrs. Ayntree's theories applied, but to woman in the abstract, to the ideal woman who yet had been revealed to him in the flesh, what did all this talk signify? It was wholly beside the mark. When he got a chance of putting in a word he only said—

"I *am* enough of a Tory to believe in letting well alone. You can't improve women—Englishwomen on what they are now. . . ."

"Oh, that's just what I hate," said Mrs. Ayntree, "evading an argument by a compliment—and such a commonplace one, too." Her good-natured smile as she made this tirade took from it any shadow of rudeness.

"It wasn't only said as a compliment," said Bertie, "I really think it's true."

"Ah, well, you're at a romantic age, Mr. Vanlennert." (Bertie blushed.) "But if you'll take my word for it, women don't want to be worshipped. I've always thought the" ("Old Gentleman," she was going to say but changed it) "Reverend Person up there must get uncommonly tired of it himself. I'm sure in his place I should say, 'Gentlemen of the Glassy Sea, you can keep your crowns on this morning, please. . . .'"

"Oh, I say!" said Bertie, rather shocked.

Kitty gave a little laugh.

"I daresay I shock you dreadfully," Mrs. Ayntree went on, "so we'll go back to what we were talking about. You men know in your hearts that pretence of worshipping women is all

humbug. It's only a varnish you put on the slavery you would like to impose upon them."

"No. What slavery?"

"The slavery of binding us down by laws which you don't impose upon yourselves." Mrs. Ayntree had this class of phrases at her finger-ends. "Laws of morality, I mean . . ." he was going on.

Bertie glanced uneasily towards Kitty. "I know what you mean," he said, hurriedly. "But you've a good deal to make up on the other side. Women don't as a rule have to battle with the world as men have."

"Oh, *don't* they? Why, take, for instance, my friend Violet Fisher. You said you knew her, didn't you? She has battled with the world since she was sixteen. And now she earns three hundred a year entirely by her own genius."

("How does she do it?" thought Bertie to himself. "And I've earned thirteen pounds and ten shillings in nearly half a year.") "Yes, I do know Miss Fisher," he said out loud. "I shouldn't call her exactly a genius, though. She's very clever, certainly. . . ."

"If she was better looking you would call her a genius fast enough. That's of course the worst of the injustices women suffer from—the ridiculous narrow-mindedness of men which makes them think only of looks."

At once a vision of Silvia side by side with a vague one of Miss Fisher rose in Bertie's mind. His eyes softened and his attention began to wander. Kitty saw the look. Her eyes, too, softened. She did not know what Bertie was thinking of; but she knew well enough now (what she had only hoped before he met Mrs. Ayntree) that where good looks got the prize she had nothing to fear.

"Isn't that Miss Fisher . . ." she was beginning, when another caller was announced. Mr. Pemberton.

Mr. Pemberton was the Honourable Hugo Pemberton. Kitty had met him before at Mrs. Ayntree's. At this moment she thought how Ionë Churton would wish to be in her shoes. Even to her it was an *embarras de richesses*. If her man of men had not been there, she would willingly enough have sat at the feet of the "Apostolic Hugh," as some of his friends called Pemberton. But she knew enough of Bertie to know that he was not likely to be particularly interested by the new caller.

Mr. Pemberton had really a beautiful face, a long straight nose, divided at the extremity, a fine silky, almost golden, beard,

and soft, yet bright grey eyes. The only drawback was the nervous contraction of the eyebrows and the rather too earnest look of the eye beneath, which gave a suggestion of possible insanity. He had begun his career by being a credit to his order. Heavy business men when they read his name in the prize-lists and honour-lists at Oxford had said with British pride, "Upon my word those young aristocrats are carrying all before them." But Hugo Pemberton had long ago broken away from all that Christ Church still, and the whole of Oxford formerly, held dear. Otherwise would he have been the admired of Violet Fisher?

What a contrast these two men presented! Mr. Pemberton was much the taller. Especially did his head, which was beginning to get bald, seem to outweigh Bertie's altogether. Kitty had given her heart to the younger, smaller, dark, alert-looking, eminently practical man. But not the less, if he had not been there, she would have liked to listen to Mr. Pemberton. She had met him once or twice in her life before; but never heard him talk in the beautiful way that Ionë Churton said he could talk.

"Come and take my side, Mr. Pemberton," said Mrs. Ayn-tree, in her pleasant way. "Mr. Vanlennert has been giving utterance to the most dreadfully old-fashioned Tory notions in favour of the subjection of women. . . ."

Mr. Pemberton gave one of his apostolic smiles but said nothing.

"But you've no chance now," said Mrs. Ayn-tree; "you're in a hopeless minority, Mr. Vanlennert."

"Not a bit," said Herbert, from whom all his depression had fallen, crossing over to Kitty's side and sitting down by her; "Kitty's on my side, aren't you?"

Kitty's heart gave an exquisite throb. Mr. Pemberton slightly coloured with the pleasure of looking at her beauty, and Mrs. Ayn-tree forgot the question they had been discussing (she was not in the least a strong-minded woman in reality) in the satisfaction of seeing those two sitting together. She straightway engaged Mr. Pemberton in a conversation on the subject of Cremation, on which he had written an article in a recent monthly.

Bertie alone was unaware of the sentimental thoughts which were centring round him.

"Well, how's Peter?" he said.

"Very well, thanks. Oh, I'm so afraid . . ."

"I know. I was just coming to that. You promised to make a portrait of him for me."

"I know I did; I hadn't forgotten, but . . ."

"You were too lazy. That's worse."

"No, really that wasn't it," and Kitty shook her thick hair about her shoulders. "But I began it once or twice, and it would not come out good enough."

"Your father told me you were getting most awfully lazy. He particularly said that next time I came to the studio I was to put you into the loft again and not let you out."

"Ah, but I shan't go up next time, now you've told me."

"Well, I shall find some other punishment next time I come. I think I shall take Peter to live with me. . . ."

"No, I'm sure you won't!"

"Yes, I shall. He encourages you to be idle. He can't even draw. All my dogs can draw."

"Draw a badger I suppose you mean."

"No, I don't; I mean draw a covert. Sold again."

"They're not called 'dogs' if they draw coverts, are they, Miss Maynard?" said Mr. Pemberton, who had not risen to the subject of cremation to-day.

Bertie laughed. "It's extraordinary," he thought, "what a relief it is getting quite out of yourself. Children always help one to that better than anybody else." He sincerely imagined that if Kitty had been the ugliest child ever created he would have found her society just the same kind of relief.

But when he went away after half an hour or so of this nonsensical talk he had an impression of Kitty not quite so pleasant as in former times. She was growing just a little bit affected he thought.

He would have been supremely disgusted if he could have heard the way in which he was talked over by the woman and the girl after he and Mr. Pemberton had both left.

It was, it has been said, no part of Mrs. Ayntree's creed that love should never be talked of among young girls. When she first gave vent to her notions about Herbert, Kitty's blushes were vehement. Presently Kitty's timidity diminished, and she began in a shy and hesitating way to talk about "Mr. Vannert" to her friend. Then they began to call him "Bertie." But it pleased them best to invent for him some romantic name. Mrs. Ayntree, whose ideas of romance were very vague and drawn only from the most accessible sources, called him "Sir

Galahad" and "Sir Lancelot." And by first one then the other of these names he had passed for some time. Sometimes he went by the name of "The Best Beloved." Once Kitty ventured the suggestion that he was like Hamlet.

This was when he had come there in some mood of temporary depression. And for some time he went by this name of Hamlet, or for a change only "The Prince."

But as it happened on this very afternoon, Mr. Pemberton, who outstayed Bertie, was rather struck by his appearance and asked who he was when he had gone.

Mrs. Ayntree explained in general terms. "But he's more a friend of Kitty's than mine," she added. "He once saved her from falling down a precipice."

"Did he really?" said Mr. Pemberton. "Where was that?"

"In Switzerland," Kitty answered. "I slipped and nearly rolled over the edge and Mr. Vanlennert caught me."

Mr. Pemberton inwardly sighed. Why had such a chance never come to him? (But such chances never *do* come to apostles.)

"He has a very interesting face," he went on, moved by generous feelings. "And what struck me so much about him is his likeness to the portraits of Frederick the Great of Prussia."

This was true. There was this likeness. Only that which one may call the etherealized impertinence of Fritz's countenance was softened down in Bertie's to a mere look of quickness, which most people noticed as the chief characteristic of his looks.

After Mr. Pemberton had gone, therefore, the married lady and the child discussed at length this new reading of Bertie's face. From that time, while the title of "The Prince" was retained, it was generally understood to refer to the Prince of Prussia rather than to the Prince of Denmark: sometimes Prince Frederick or Prince Fritz was substituted for it. Moreover, the two friends determined to embark upon Carlyle's *Frederick the Great* and read it out aloud together. "I should like to read it again," Mrs. Ayntree said.

This plan gave the two friends a new excuse for meeting and became a further link in their friendship. It was no bad piece of reading for Kitty, whose knowledge of English literature had up till now been almost entirely confined to poetry.

Notwithstanding, Kitty did not go very happy to bed that night. Strange to say she was quite aware both of the fact

that she was becoming self-conscious and affected in Bertie's presence, and that he saw it and was displeased thereat. And yet a power outside her seemed to force her to act in this way against her will, against her own deeper feelings. Each time they met she felt as if she were building up a wall between them, and yet she always longed for the next time that she might remove the bad impression: she longed and longed with a pitiful devotion that Bertie might be enabled to read all that was in her heart.

And now it was getting so late in the season. He would be going away and so would they. She would be even separated from her friend, though Mrs. Ayntree had got a promise from Maynard that Kitty should pay them a visit in their little cottage at Haslemere. She had vaguely talked of asking Bertie down. But Kitty knew enough of his life to feel sure he would not come. She should not see him for months and months. "Oh, what *am* I to do all that time!" she said, lying with her face buried in her pillow, into which even a few tears sank.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE evening of the same day as it chanced on which Bertie paid this call on Mrs. Ayntree or on Kitty, Kitty's father found himself at a large party in Carlton House Terrace, to which Lady Aldenborough was also invited. It was one of the hottest days of the season. But here seats and tables were placed out upon the terrace, and crowds of people passed up and down under the awning or under the stars, and gazed over the dark St. James's Park above which the Clock Tower at Westminster held up a column of light. There was no twelve o'clock rule then, and as a matter of fact this was what in those days was called an "Irish Night," so that the sitting was expected to last till some uncertain hour of the morning. A certain number of M. P.'s had been at the party, Sir John Aldenborough among them, and had been summoned away to take part in a division; and this gave rather a political complexion to the conversation of the crowd on the terrace.

But Maynard and Lady Aldenborough had been lucky enough to get seats in a corner. People passed and repassed half in

light and half in shadow, and scraps of conversation fell upon their ears in which the words "speech," "division," "party," "obstruction," were oddly interchanged with others of a softer kind.

"I wish I could get up any interest in politics," said Lady Aldenborough, with a sigh.

"I've never got so far as even to wish that. . . . And yet I do take an interest in politics in a certain sense. Only what are called party politics lie so entirely outside all the changes that I think would benefit the people at large. What do they really care? . . . But I dare say my opinions would be too radical for you," Maynard said, stopping himself.

"No, I don't think they would. Tell me your opinions, please. I should so like to hear them. Sir John calls himself a radical, you know."

"Yes," answered Maynard, hesitatingly. "Only I'm afraid, as I've said, that my socialism goes beyond. . . ."

"But you needn't be afraid of shocking me," Lady Aldenborough said; "I say I don't understand politics—as they are," she added, as an after-thought. "If you were a . . . king now . . . or . . . a, what do you call it? a dictator . . . what should you do?"

"Well, I am afraid, for one thing, I should do away with all titles."

"Oh, *should* you?" Lady Aldenborough spoke as if Maynard had said he should pull down all the churches, not precisely shocked, for it was her *métier* to receive all manner of ideas, but as if the proposition were almost too bold for her to lay hold of all at once. "But surely titles don't do any *harm*, at all events, even if they don't do good. . . ."

"Nobody could say they did any good except to the people who had them," Maynard went on, "and they only do good to them because they want something which separates them from the rest of their fellow-creatures."

"I see," said Lady Aldenborough, musingly. She, more than her partner, began to see that the subject of their conversation was misplaced. Besides, she did not care for abstract questions. "But," she went on, "people can't help being different from their fellow-creatures—in talent, for instance. You would not like to paint no better than I do, for instance. You'd be very 'sorry for yourself' if you suddenly became no cleverer than I am." And she gave a light pleasant laugh as she brought out this Americanism.

"Oh, no, I'm sure I should not. That's not at all a case in point. Even in painting . . ."

"Now don't please think it necessary to pay me a compliment on my painting."

"A compliment means something insincere. But I won't even say anything sincere if you don't like it."

"No, I think I won't put temptation in your way."

"The misfortune is that now-a-days you must concentrate yourself on one thing if you want to get on. But it's much better really to be clever all round."

"Do you mean that I am to consider myself clever all round? Bravo!" Lady Aldenborough spoke in a still more girlish manner. "I wish you would persuade Sir John of that, that I am clever all round. I'm afraid he does not think me clever in financial matters."

"Ah, well, you're . . . quite right to leave financial matters to men." Maynard began to think that he was getting quite ready in society.

"But," said Lady Aldenborough, suddenly becoming grave, "I think it is dreadful the useless lives we women lead, and the tie that society is upon you. . . ." She heaved a sigh, and after a minute's reflection continued, "I dare say it will seem absurd to you, but when I was a girl I had such a longing to be a great painter. . . ."

"Why should I think it absurd? Because when I was a boy, a young man at least, I had the same longing."

"Ah, don't make fun of me," said Lady Aldenborough, sadly. "That's why I feel so grateful to you for listening to my rubbish sometimes. I . . ."

"Oh, but upon my word . . . I . . . that's the last thing I should dream of doing . . . or trying to do; for no one could do it," said Maynard, with great emphasis. His answer was to the first half of her sentence. He saw immediately afterwards the application which *might* be given to it. So did Lady Aldenborough as a matter of fact, but she did not wish to change the character of their talk.

"What a wonderful thing it is to have 'arrived,' as the French say!" she said, half sadly.

"Arrived—where?" said Maynard.

"Well, you have arrived you know, Mr. Maynard," and as she said this she raised her eyes to his, eyes from which all trace of fun had disappeared, nay, which were slightly moist. "After working on, I can image it . . . for yourself . . .

doing what you knew was the right thing . . . to come before the world with a perfect work like your great picture. . . ."

"Oh, but . . . it's such a very long way from being a perfect work."

"To you I dare say. . . . Because you can conceive of something beyond it. . . . Of course when I say perfect"—at this point Lady Aldenborough laid her fan across his arm, and the touch was exquisitely pleasant to Maynard—"I mean—you must feel it yourself—to be able to say to the world, 'Here I have produced this. . . . Could you do better? . . . Can you find any fault in it?'"

"The critics have found a great many faults," he said, smiling.

"Oh, the *critics*! But be honest, Mr. Maynard. Don't you feel that it is a great thing? That is what I mean by having arrived."

Lady Aldenborough spoke better now. For she was really a shy person, and sometimes made herself seem silly when she was not so by nature.

"To a certain extent, yes," he answered. "It is a comfort, a great relief. After you have worked on for years and years, always doubting of yourself and getting so little encouragement. . . ." He, too, spoke with more freedom now, for he had got upon a subject on which he could be eloquent.

"Yes, yes," said Lady Aldenborough, "I've often wondered to myself what it was like. How a man of genius feels"—Maynard made a gesture—"well, then, I'll say a great painter—how he feels all the years that he is working in secret—for almost all have to, haven't they? To work years and years . . ."

"Yes," Maynard answered, with a sigh. "It doesn't seem worth . . ."

"Oh, don't say that; least of all now that you have arrived. It must be so pleasant to look back. I remember once you told me that your picture was taken from what you had seen years ago when you were quite a child. . . ."

And in this manner she fairly started her friend upon one of those confidences about the past which bind people together so closely.

They were both surprised suddenly to find how empty the terrace had grown.

"Ah, well," sighed Lady Aldenborough, glancing up at the Victoria Tower. "They are still sitting. Sir John won't be able to fetch me away." And when she said good-bye, she

gave Maynard a most friendly pressure of the hand. "How good of you to tell me so many interesting things!" she said with a sort of fervour. "I have enjoyed this talk so much. Mind you come some Wednesday soon."

When she went home, Lady Aldenborough reflected how much better she had spoken, how much better she had expressed herself, than she generally did, under her own roof, for instance—in fact, when Sir John was there. And yet to-night she had been talking to a man of genius, much greater really than Sir John or half a dozen members of Parliament. But genius, real genius, is always modest, she reflected. Then her thoughts carried her back to her girlhood in Thurstanton Rectory and to the dreams she had had in those days of the sort of man she would marry. That ideal man had not the features of Sir John Aldenborough.

Maynard, too, that night went back to the dreams of his youth—a beautiful fashionable woman exquisitely dressed subdued by the admiration of his genius. No one would have called Lady Aldenborough beautiful. She was thin and long-nosed, and she had not much to boast of in the way of a complexion. But her eyes were certainly very deep and tender, and her hair was bright, and she was generally beautifully dressed.

Even outsiders began to notice what a conquest Maynard had made.

"Lady Aldenborough's quite 'gone' on you, as they say," said Baldwin, with his affected manner. "I heard her talking about you for half an hour yesterday and saying what a genius you were and what beautiful ideas you had." Baldwin had forgiven Maynard his strange conduct at Churton's, after meeting him at the Duke of Flamborough's and at other first-rate houses.

It is just such a word from an outsider which is needful to strike the fire from a vain and modest man such as was Henry Maynard. From this time forward to the end of the summer—of the session, in truth—he entered upon a new world of romance. We have compared him to a young *débutante*; and he was as ignorant of the world in which he now moved as is that young person. In a month's time, without himself being aware of the fact, Maynard was genuinely in love with Lady Aldenborough. There was almost no element, even latent, of sensuality in his feelings. He felt no special desire even to hold his lady's hand. He could not dance, and so had never for a moment held her

round the waist. But having once looked into the depths of her liquid dark eyes there was no peace for him till he looked again.

When a man of forty takes the fever in this way he often takes it more severely than does a young man; and this is (it sounds like a paradox to say so) because there is little or no sensual element in his passion, as in the passion of youth—consciously or unconsciously—there always is.

CHAPTER XXII.

THERE is something very strange in the sudden transfer of one's existence from London to a German watering-place. At first the latter seems by comparison the very picture of cheapness, of regular habits, of simple rusticities. How quiet and rural and bourgeois are the Kurgarten and the Kursaal!—both ugly enough in their way, red-brick architecture picked out with white, with staring jalousies, with stunted limes and acacias, square conventional ponds at the ends of the walks, glass balls on pedestals, and the stand where the band plays. But the very ugliness has a charm, suggestive of innocence and peace. Silvia, at any rate, felt this—at first. And Lady Tennant began to get visibly stronger in the pure air and simpler life. Lady Tennant was cleverer than her daughter and better read; and, when her talents were not all taken up for social purposes, she was no bad companion. Silvia began to repent her of her act of quasi-rebellion. She would, at any rate, wait until Bertie was a little older, till the family were more inclined to receive him.

After a week, the mother and daughter began to feel the strain of their solitary life; they were not used to be thrown so much together. And just then appeared their first fellow-countryman—the first person Lady Tennant cared to know, that is. This was old Mr. Kynnersley. He had not been abroad for thirty years, and knew nothing of modern watering-places and their ways. Though he had a good property in Yorkshire, old Mr. Kynnersley spent most of his days in London. This year, to wean him from his club and its wines, the doctors had managed to get him off to Homburg. Lady Tennant naturally came forward to help a countryman who

was socially all right, and old Ralph Kynnersley was unspeakably grateful for the help she gave him in understanding the manners and customs of the place.

"It's not a sort of thing I'm very much used to," he explained. "I'm rather a man of habit, that's the truth. There's a nephew of mine, my sister's son, who promised to join me out here. But he won't come till the end of the week. Richard Panton; I don't know whether you know him by any chance. A very nice young fellow; you'll like him, I'm sure."

"I remember meeting a Sir Richard Panton some years ago at Lord Riversworth's. But he cannot be your nephew I feel sure."

"No, that would be his father. He died, poor fellow, six or seven years ago, and my poor sister fifteen years ago, I should say, at least. They had a large family, chiefly girls. Dick's been very good to them all. But they are mostly married and settled now."

Here was enough to give Lady Tennant a new interest in life. Providence seemed to be bent on giving Silvia chances beyond her deserts. This nephew, Richard, was evidently now the Yorkshire baronet. Meantime Lady Tennant had heard from Gertrude, who gave her no hint of Percy's plans, so soon as Parliament should have risen.

To Silvia, who had heard the beginning of the conversation, the advent of a Yorkshire baronet, who was further described as "a nice young fellow," could not be a matter of complete indifference either.

"Any new-comer who is at all decent will be an addition. It's not very lively here." She had now been in Homburg, it has been said, seven days. "Of course, I like the real country as well as any one. But one has no duties of any sort in Homburg, and it is not real country. I can't walk about by myself, as I could at Netley. Dear me, what a beautiful place Netley is!" It seemed to her as she thought of it that she knew Netley in all weathers and at all times of the year. But it was, in reality, only through Bertie's talks about it that she knew it so well, better perhaps than she would have done if she had seen it with her own eyes. And she thought afterwards that there must have been some mysterious influence working upon her while she was in this reverie. For, as it happened, the afternoon post brought a letter from Bertie.

"Dear Silvia," he wrote, "I don't know whether I ought to write to you like this, or to say Miss Tennant. It was a most

terrible disappointment to me, as soon as I was allowed by the doctor to make calls, to find that you had left town so unexpectedly. But it was very good of you to write to me directly you got to Homburg and give me your address." ("So it was," thought Silvia, though before she had reproached herself for being very cold in not writing to tell him directly they left London. "But I am so glad it has made him happy, poor boy.") "It seems absurd to begin writing about commonplace things when my whole heart is filled with love of you, and yet I am afraid to offend you if I go on too long about that. So I will try and tell you my ordinary news." (All this was sweet rather than otherwise to Silvia Tennant.)

"My friend Charlie Orcher has turned up in London, but only for a few days. Indeed, he's only going to be in England a month or five weeks. I was very glad to see him again. We parted in Switzerland nearly a year ago, when he went to Rome for the first time. I called with him at the Attewoodes, and we dined there the other day. But I believe they have now gone down to Derbyshire, Mr. Attewoode as well; he's got a pair for the rest of the session. Charlie goes down to-morrow. It makes me rather envious, everybody going down into the country now, as I am staying up till August, as long as my chambers are open, and I have a little literary work to do as well." (Silvia knew all about the *Piccadilly Review* now.) "Anyway, I should not enjoy life in Derbyshire as long as Netley was empty. But I earnestly hope you will not stay at Homburg beyond the time you originally intended, and will come there afterwards. If you do not, I don't know what I shall do. I shall, I expect, spend all my holidays either at Gretton or at Roundway Temple" ("After all," thought Silvia, "mama really *ought* to ask him to stay at Netley this summer," and Bertie had made the same reflection as he wrote), "and I shall be working hard a great part of the time with Wheatley to get the affairs of the property in order. . . ."

And then followed more news. This little passage about his property rather grated upon Silvia. It looked as if he thought that money considerations had any influence upon her. At that moment came a tap at the door. "Yes, mother. Dear me, I shall be late for dinner!" Silvia folded up the letter, and put it in a drawer just as her mother came into the room.

The next thing of interest which happened was the arrival of Sir Richard Panton. His first appearance was something

of a shock to both Lady Tennant and her daughter. The former remembered meeting the father—as it seemed to her—only a few years ago, and that he did not seem to be much older than herself. She forgot the tolerably mature age of her own son, and she had not married very young. As the fact was, Sir Richard Panton looked forty. He was strongly built, with reddish-brown hair, bald at the crown. He was certainly not handsome, Lady Tennant was obliged to confess. A little way off, he looked as old as his uncle, who was always so neatly dressed, and so slim and so brisk, in spite of his gout, and with such beautiful, small, white hands. The nephew's were large, strong, and freckled. But his face was not a commonplace one. When he began to speak, Silvia, who sat next him, had a momentary sensation of having met him before. Then, with a sudden thrill and a flash, she remembered whom he recalled; "that Mr. Bertram;" it was the voice that was so wonderfully like. Sir Richard did not seem any more polished than Mr. Bertram was, and was quite as unlike the ordinary young man who hovered round Silvia. But Lady Tennant was very gracious to him; and Silvia thought, with a note of rebellion in her heart, that her mother's manner would have been quite different if it had not been the Yorkshire baronet she had beside her, but the man who seemed to her to be his prototype. Sometimes, when Silvia's eyes were on her plate, she could hardly persuade herself that this was not the case. Sir Richard was not an interesting talker like the other. He was rather heavy and solemn.

"Are you fond of the country?" he said, suddenly, to Miss Tennant.

"Very. We live in such a beautiful county, too. Do you know Derbyshire?" ("How queer," she thought, "that he should begin in that abrupt way! That makes the likeness to Mr. Bertram all the greater.")

"Very little. I suppose you don't live in the country all the year."

"Oh, no; we come up to London for the season—or part of it," she added, informed by her feminine sixth sense that her companion at best only tolerated London and the season. "But one is so glad to get back to the country, don't you think so?"

"It isn't getting back with me. For you see, not being a young lady, I'm not obliged to go up to London for the season."

"Oh, well, I think a change now and then does people good," she answered, rather coldly.

"Of course, of course," he interposed, in an apologetic voice. "Still, our country is very pleasant and—beautiful, I must say," and for all the ludicrous commonplaceness of the remark, there was a vibrating touch on the last words which Silvia's quick ear detected. She gave him a hasty sidelong glance. "Poor fellow," she said to herself, "he has some romance connected with it. I wonder what it is."

Later that same evening Silvia learnt from her mother what that romance was. The outlines Lady Tennant had heard from Mr. Ralph Kynnersley, but she wove them into a narrative in the graceful way of which she had the gift.

"It seems that Sir Richard Panton had a sister whom he was devotedly attached to. I think they were twins. This is the reason he has never married. And she, poor thing, was burnt to death, or partly blown up, just two years ago. She was making something for her brother—filling cartridges, perhaps—doing something with gunpowder, at all events. And it exploded—*burnt* her, Mr. Kynnersley says, in a terrible way, burnt or blew part of her face away. Can you imagine anything more shocking? And she didn't die quite immediately in spite of that. Isn't it strange that such terrible things should happen?"

"Frightful!" said Silvia.

"And you would think she must have suffered so terribly. But no; Mr. Kynnersley says she did not feel it in the least. She was only conscious of feeling very cold."

Then the gentle-hearted Silvia felt sorry that she had snubbed Sir Richard even to the little extent that she had done so. She remembered that she had been sorry afterwards for snubbing Mr. Bertram. How strange! That same night, too, as Fate would have it, she thought she ought to answer Bertie Vanlennert's letter. And so she sat down and wrote:

"MY DEAR MR. VANLENNERT—Of course I cannot write to you as you do to me, though I am very, very grateful to you for caring for me much more than I deserve. I was very sorry that we had to leave so suddenly, and hope that it will not be necessary for mama to stay here more than three weeks more at the most, and that then we shall go to beautiful Netley. But it is better to be patient and wait, isn't it? I hope the work that you say you have to do does not worry you.

You must not think that what you call your difficulties makes the least difference with anyone, or that mama and Gertrude do not both like and respect you as I do. I am so glad that you have your friend Mr. Orcher with you. I have never seen him, but I am sure he must be nice if he is a friend of yours. I suppose you will be going to Gretton quite soon now. When you go, give my best love to dear Molly. I have no news that will be of any interest to you. The Arbuthnots have just come, and they are about the only people we knew before we came, except indeed Mr. Bannister, the actor, whom, of course, we knew in a certain way. He is very nice and amusing, and is altogether a great addition, only his wife is rather vulgar. Then there is an old Mr. Ralph Kynnersley. He knew your name quite well, and said he lived just opposite to you in St. James's Place. So you see, if I want to hear anything about your 'goings on,' I have only to ask him. And there is a relation of his, a Sir Richard Panton, whom we have only just seen.

"Of course you know what the life at places like this is. The band and drinking waters in the morning, band and drinking waters in the afternoon, or for me seeing mama drink. I am glad to say that it really seems to be doing her good, which is everything. Between whiles there is a great deal of *table-d'hôte*, and very often there is dancing in the Kursaal in the evening, and that I enjoy. There are one or two German officers here who dance beautifully, and a young Russian, such a funny boy. They are at our hotel; Rostoptchine the name in the book is—Prince Rostoptchine *und Familie*. (But the family does not include the mother, who is alive; she apparently stays to manage the property in Russia.) One of the sisters is decidedly pretty and has made great friends with me, and I have a notion that Nicholas Nickolai-vitch, as she calls her brother, believes himself deeply in love with me. But I can fancy that he is used to falling in love with every girl that he has known as long as three days.

"Now I must end my letter, for the bell for one of the many *tables-d'hôte* has just sounded. Good-bye, dear Mr. Vannennert (or dear Bertie, if you will). I shall always thank you for being so good to me. Your affectionate friend,

"SILVIA TENNANT."

Bertie read and re-read this letter with rapture, and his heart beat fast. Silvia had never addressed him so affection-

ately before. And he kept the letter always in his breast-pocket for reperusal, along with the much shorter one she wrote when they first arrived at Homburg. Only he wished that the sentence "I hope then we shall go to beautiful Netley" had not been in it. It struck chilly somehow; he could not tell why.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was September—near the end. Maynard had been a month down at his native village, and had now deposited his family there and gone off for a little sketching tour alone.

He had once looked forward not a little to this autumn holiday. It was a sort of triumphal return to his home. Not that the whole of Maynard's family were crowded into his mother's house. No, what was—what was to have been—the triumph of it was that he had taken Coombe Halladay Rectory for two months—from the successors of the Fulgroves—for the late rector had died, and the next presentation had not been in the hands of the Fulgrove family. The new rector Maynard declared to be a very decent fellow. He thought, that is, quite as much of the distinguished painter as of old Captain Bywater.

And Maynard had enjoyed this triumph, this sense of ease and completeness in his career for the first week of August when he had brought his family down. For then there loomed in the near distance a visit to the opposite side of England—namely, to the Duke of Flamborough in the north—casually mentioned, that posed him in the eyes of some of the old friends of the family. Now that visit had long past. And Maynard could not conceal from himself that it had not been a success. Lady Aldenborough had been there; that is of course. But she had been different somehow; he could not say how. He himself had been different, that was another thing. With his principles of independence it had been, he secretly felt, rather shameful to be found at Flamborough Park at all; but when there to be treated as a sort of show person hired for the occasion, that was worse. Whereas Lady Aldenborough had been made much of, and had become quite a cousin again. This was, in fact, the occasion of her being formally received back into the Flamborough family, from which she had quite dropped since she was a child. She and the present duke had played together

as children, for really Thurstanton is no distance from Flamborough Park. But till it had been seen how Mr. Aldenburg turned out in London society, it was not safe to take her up again. Now that the husband had become Sir John Aldenborough, a baronet and an M. P., it was felt that Georgie was "all right." Maynard did not understand these fine distinctions: to do her justice, no more did Lady Aldenborough render herself account of them. All that could be said was that she was sensitive to her atmosphere. She and Maynard equally felt that their relations had changed. Their tender friendship of a month ago would have seemed supremely ridiculous to the ladies Hilda and Constance Runcorne, the duke's unmarried sisters. It was a very active, vigorous, out-of-door existence that people lived at Flamborough Park, and there really was no place there for misunderstood lives and the aspirations of genius.

Now, it has been said, it was September, and Maynard—who could no longer stand life at Coombe Halladay—had set off to take what was supposed to be an artistic tour. July and August had been hot and generally fine. Now the weather had turned to thunder. And day after day, evening after evening, the clouds grouped themselves into new shapes, strange and majestic. Maynard noted them with an eye practised in noting the forms and colours of nature: the vast pile of pillowy cloud which seemed to tower miles in the air and grew pink in the sunset light: the indigo washes which showed clear against the pale blue sky and bore the very brush marks of the Great Artist who had laid them on; behind their edges the sun grew small: there were a hundred effects to be seen. But Maynard was not doing any work: an utter paralysis of will kept him from even trying to catch these shifting beauties. The very thought of doing so filled him with disgust. And he wandered on and on, eyeing the countrymen as they trudged beside their waggon, the women with fair hair and sun-browned skin which glowed beneath their sun-bonnets, children playing within a shaded gateway against a whitewashed wall stained green with damp: all subjects which would have inspired him yesterday, of which he saw the possibilities better than he had ever done before, but had no longer the power of making use of them. Yet for this willessness he continued not the less to curse himself and his fate.

Only at night came some relief to his melancholy. At night

it is not possible to use colours. In the evening hours, sitting in the parlour of his inn, for the time being, his artistic sense took note without self-reproach of the faces and gestures of the natives who turned in one by one when their day's work was over.

"Well, Gearge, I'm zorry to year you'n lost one of your lambs. Hoo did it yappen, man?" This from one man standing at the bar as he came in.

"Doant knau ah'm zhure. It warn't no fault of mine it warn't—though the master he were hurful mād with oi, hurful mād he wurre."

"If it had been in ovr varm that's no more than what you might ha looked vor, with the geäts in the sdate they be," a third rustic interposed. "It's yuppen 'ouësekeeping on ovr varm and no mistaäk. Good-evening, Mr. Hopkins. You played voine to us last Zunday, that you did . . ." This, as with a brief "Good-evening," Mr. Hopkins, librarian and organist, and therefore a member of the superior classes, passed somewhat hurriedly within the bar. The speaker looked round at his fellow-labourers to underline his praise with a point of irony.

Maynard followed Mr. Hopkins into the inner room.

"That's a gentleman from Lunnon I yearre," was the last observation he caught from the group of exoteric drinkers.

Within the bar the drinking and smoking were deliberate, and were at first carried on in almost utter silence. Mr. Hopkins had saluted the only member already there, a farmer of huge dimensions. The organist's salutation had a touch of deference in it, and was acknowledged by the other without his changing the direction of his eyes. Maynard said, "Good-evening." "Good-evening, sir," said Hopkins, briskly. The other said the same words solemnly. He turned his eyes for a moment to Maynard's face, then they took the same straightforward gaze which they had before.

"Is Mr. Collins coming in to-night?" he said at last, between two puffs.

"I don't know, I am sure," said Hopkins. "I have not seen him to-day. I should think he would be most likely to come in to-night. Thursdays he scarcely ever misses, I think. . . ." Hopkins seemed to feel the greater necessity to go on speaking that his words produced no apparent effect on anyone. "It is Thursday night, to-night, isn't it? I'm not mistaken. . . ." He glanced at Maynard a little as he said this.

"Yes, to-day is Thursday," said Maynard reassuringly, as

he took his pipe and pouch out of his pocket. But he, too, only glanced at his interrogator. The old farmer had seemed for a moment as if he were going to speak, but now pulled at his pipe again in silence.

"Thank you, sir, yes; it's strange how these things slip your memory at a moment sometimes. Of course if I'd given it a thought I might have known well what day it was. . . ." And this time Mr. Hopkins spoke frankly to Maynard.

"I daresay you work very hard," said Maynard, who from his boyhood had been used to many different sorts of society. "That destroys the memory." He spoke with perfect gravity.

"Well, no," said Hopkins, fidgetting a little at the phrase, "destroys the memory." ("He must be a doctor," he thought. "I hope . . .") "No, sir, I can't say that I work over and above hard. I have my library to attend to, of course. . . ." Mr. Hopkins always called his shop his library.

"I daresay you read a great deal," said Maynard.

"Well, yes," said Hopkins, not knowing whether to be flattered or alarmed. "I am a good deal of a reader, I must confess."

But here the farmer, who was almost behind Maynard, once more removed his pipe and spat audibly into a spittoon. "If hard work destroyed the memory I ought not to have much left by now," he said. But he spoke as if he were addressing the air.

At this moment a thick-set, undersized man, with a very red face and white moustache and beard, came into the bar: Hopkins turned to him with a sense of relief.

"What do you say, doctor?" he asked. "We were talking whether hard work was bad for the memory, that is to say, that is what this gentleman was saying."

"Not a . . . well, I daresay with some folks it may—it's not destroyed mine, I know." And as one or two other men had followed him in he addressed the company generally, ignoring Maynard. "If you were to get hold of my books for the last twenty years and ask me about any person whose name you found there, I'll be bound to say I could answer you."

"Oh, he'd *answer* you fast enough," one of the new-comers, a young man, whispered to the other, under cover of orders which were being given to Mary the barmaid. "But the question is . . ."

But the other man turned away from him before he had time to finish his sentence, and only said, "and cold for me, Mary."

"Cold Irish, isn't it, sir?"

"Why, you know well enough what I take, Mary. If you don't I don't know who should," he said, in a tone of sham discontent, thrusting, as he spoke, a thumb into the armhole of his waistcoat. Mary wreathed her face in smiles.

The general conversation still tended to turn back to the proposition Maynard had laid down and to the subject of memory.

"The truth is," said another alert-looking man, with grey mutton-chop whiskers, carrying a riding-crop and dressed in a cut-away melton coat and gaiters and square-crowned wide-awake (he looked the picture of a country squire though he was in fact the lawyer of the place), "I've always believed the saying, 'It's not work but worry that wears the man out.'"

"You're right," said the huge farmer, solemnly spitting for the second time. And everyone felt that the way he said this was a guarantee that, if litigation ever became necessary in the affairs of the Spragton Vale farm, it was lawyer Wellbrook who would have the conduct of it.

Maynard sat rather apart and watched and listened. This was the time when he felt contented with himself and all the world. How ridiculous to worry oneself because one has not been up to work lately! Did not one generation succeed another in this old bar-room with the black rafter across the middle and the old oak table stained by the glasses of a century? and did they not tread in their forefathers' steps as closely as they could, and never think of initiating anything new? And the labourers on the other side, did not they, son after father, follow the plough in the same manner, men mind their sheep as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had minded theirs, and when the day's labours were over repeat their time-honoured jokes every night when they met within the inn doors? The intense and immutable leisure of the country was all about him: it was only in London that people imagined you must be always working and always getting on. Why should he ever go back to London? Why not settle down somewhere in the country and paint when he chose. But here, with a keen pang, came back the thought of Lady Aldenborough and her dove-like eyes. Ah! Over there it was indeed different: nothing remained the same. It was a perpetual change. . . .

Maynard was a popular man with the landlords of the inns to which he came, as a gentleman who did not confine himself to one glass, and yet always behaved like a gentleman. They

were most of them surprised to see a painter so well appointed. For since his days of prosperity began Maynard had become something of a dandy.

This was the general judgment upon him at the beginning of his little tour.

One morning, however, when he had just got up and slowly and with a shaky hand was trying to make preparations for his toilet—it seemed to him that he saw the room he was in, with its four twisted mahogany bedposts and heavy chintz hangings for the first time that morning—a boy began playing an accordion a few doors off.

“My God!” he said, after the noise had gone on for a minute. “I can’t stand this.” He rushed to the bell-rope—it was a broad band of embroidered velvet with a brass ring at the end—and pulled it violently. But it worked somewhat stiffly and he could not be sure that it had rung.

It was not possible to wait and see. He felt that his life depended on stopping that row. “Oh my God, my God,” he cried out loud, “I cannot stand this!” and again he pulled the rope, and went on pulling till the housemaid rushed upstairs two steps at a time and knocked at the door breathless.

The noise was *still* going on.

“Oh, for goodness’ sake stop that noise!” cried Maynard from within. He was trembling in every limb.

“Yes, zir, what noise, zir?”

“Why, good heavens, the noise outside! . . . Oh, my God, my God!” he moaned. The maid seemed still to be standing there irresolute. “The fool—she doesn’t understand. Oh-h!” He rushed to the door and opened it, forgetting his attire. “That noise outside!” he almost roared.

The maid stood as one transfixed for the moment, the next, “Yes, zir, yes, zir,” she said, and fled downstairs and out into the yard, then round to the front of the house, where she found Dan’l the ostler.

“Oh, Dan’l, I wish you’d go to the gentleman in number zix.”

“What’s the matter with number zix?”

“Why, you needn’t axe . . . you can year un now.” In her agitation Susan slipped back into her broadest dialect.

The accordion was still playing, and Susan and Dan’l heard indistinctly the voice of the gentleman a little above their heads.

“Oh, my God, my God!” Maynard was moaning to himself.

"Can't they stop that noise a *moment*? Mercy, mercy! just a moment! I'm the most wretched abandoned outcast in the whole world. If Polly had been a decent wife to me she would have been here now, and I should not have been treated in this frightful way."

Maynard was holding his hands against his ears and stamping up and down the room. The next moment he threw open the window and bawled out at the top of his voice, "Stop that noise for God's sake! I'm not well." Then he went back and threw himself upon his bed and sobbed like a child.

Dan'l and Susan, who were not used to have to take sudden resolutions, had not yet decided what course to pursue.

"My God, he's get 'em, and that purrty bad," said Dan'l under his breath.

"My gracious, d'yew think it that?" said Susan.

"I'm zhure it is. It's the mewsick ye means. You step over, Zewsan, to tell them at Mr. Cleggate's as there's a gentleman ill at the Lion, and if the young gentleman ud kindly stop his playing. I'll go to un myself."

But now the music stopped of itself. Maynard's calling out through the window drew the attention of some passers-by; a little crowd began to collect before the window, and Mr. Cleggate, the surveyor's son, attracted by this sight, had gone to the window to watch.

For his part, Dan'l knocked at Maynard's door.

The artist raised himself from the bed and tried to collect himself. "Come in," he said. Dan'l entered. The tears were still on Maynard's cheeks; but the paroxysm had passed and he felt only dazed.

"'Fraid you're not well, zir," said Dan'l, putting his hand to his hair.

"Not well? Yes. What's the matter?"

"Only you called out as if you warn't quite the thing, zir."

"Oh, yes. That noise. I'm not very well. In fact, I've got a racking headache. If you would kindly ask the man to stop his playing for the present."

"Yes. Zewsan, she's gone, zir, to axe un. And I don't year it no more," he said, throwing open the window. "Beautiful marning, zir, after the rain. Shall I bring you a little hot water, zir? Maybe you'd like a bit of breakfast?"

"Yes. No, I'll get up to breakfast. You can bring me some hot water. And . . . I'll take a small Irish whiskey and

ater." Maynard said this with as indifferent and as
ed a manner as he could assume.

rtently, zir. I'll bring it up myself, zir," Dan'l answered,
t any change of countenance.

en minutes' time the whole scene had passed like a
out of Maynard's mind.

rhaps you'd prefer to have your breakfast in your room
orning, zir," said Dan'l, when he brought up the hot water
e whiskey and soda. "I'll tell Mrs. Mason if you wish it,

, it doesn't matter . . . yes, I'd better," Maynard an-
, for he saw Dan'l's look of surprise at the negative.
e realised that his calling out from the window and all
ging of his bell must have given occasion for talk, and
e must act up to his character of invalid.

. Mason brought up his breakfast herself.

r. Cleggate's sent to say he was very sorry he'd troubled
r, being ill," she said, in her smoothest manner.

He must keep to his room, that was clear. He did in-
feel ill enough, and his hands were still trembling. He
o appetite for the ham and eggs, but he ate some toast
ank all the thick lu-warm coffee. Then he went to the
v.

e lingerers remained of the little crowd that had gath-

The whole scene came back upon him. He began to re-
ow his conduct had appeared to the outside world. He
not let them see him. He withdrew so far that a ledge
ekwork below his window cut off all the pavement im-
ely beneath.

re lay the market-place sleeping its mid-week sleep in the
Maynard noticed the irregular shadow which lay across
ft side of it, corresponding to the varying heights of
which were mostly out of sight, and opposite, not far
he corner, was the market-cross, so called—an octagonal
d roof overshadowing stone seats. On one of these an
oman was sunning herself. She had no knitting or
t, but bent forwards on her stick, always in the same
le; on another side two boys were playing at marbles.
cher was standing in front of his shop by the kerb,
g on a closed stall and talking to a man in cords and
, who struck them from time to time with a riding-whip;
farthest corner of the square before the rival inn, the
(innumerable were the jokes in Great Selwood on the

Lion and the Lamb), a dray was unloading. From a house exactly opposite, which stood a little back from the rest and had a heavy iron railing in front, bearing a brass plate, there issued a young man, a lawyer's clerk or a doctor's apprentice, which? Maynard decided for the former. Then his ear caught from somewhere out of sight a faint sound of splashing water: and this was drowned again by the noise of a gig driving up to the Lion and under the archway.

There was nothing in the scene; and for a moment Maynard looked on it with a lazy interest.

Suddenly there smote upon him in irresistible force the thought, the sense—he had had it before; all artists must have it; but now it came with an overwhelming power—the sense of the utter unreality of his life of imitation side by side with the real life which spread itself below—a minute fragment, no doubt, but a real part of the great life of the world. For what had he been living and striving all these years?—living laborious days? For shadows. Men like that little lawyer's clerk who was on his side of the square now and looked so busy and self-satisfied, or the butcher and farmer there who were now shaking hands and saying good-bye, men bent solely upon their own business in life, with no cares, no preoccupation, but to eat and drink, marry and produce offspring, destined to eat and drink and marry as they had done—these were the men for whom the earth gave forth her increase: they were doing what they were meant to do. It was he and such as he, the self-examining, self-torturing, self-conscious, infinitely small minority, who were living in disobedience to Nature. Did she want man to try and fashion beauty out of her works? What could he do at his best to compare with the least of these? But when men lived the lives they were meant to live, went on from generation to generation in a natural and simple manner, supplying their obvious wants, they produced beautiful things without intending it. That old square, for instance, with the houses standing forward or back, with the irregular shadow across its cobblestones: if it had been built with an eye to architectural beauty what would it probably have been like?—mere hideousness.

Oh, God! He had never seen this so clearly before. He vaguely thought of all the *fashions* in what were called the fine arts, and how one generation turned to the wall the pictures that the previous generation had adored. He thought of some of the monstrosities he had seen at the smart houses to which

he had been asked. The false Titians, the hideous Rubens, the Poussins, the Canalettos, the stuff—was not in every gallery the rubbish in the majority? He had had a sort of shrinking premonition of what he understood now, when he looked at these “celebrated collections,” that all conscious art was a failure, a mockery, a defiance of Nature, and she revenged herself by bringing it to nothing.

Yes, now he understood it all. He gazed and gazed upon the square in its stillness and sunshine with its resounding echoes. And as a contrasted picture he called up the Duke of Flamborough’s gallery. And with that picture came back the memory of all his last season, of Lady Aldenborough. . . . Ah, woe! woe! woe!

His work was finished: that was it! His last anchor to life. . . . Worse than the loss of wife or child, worse than starvation, to be obliged to say with Othello, “My occupation’s gone.”

From that morning Maynard’s artistic tour came to an end. He had done little or nothing as it was: from that morning he ceased to try and do anything. He seldom even went out: he ate but little. In revenge he drank freely. At length he had a genuine attack of *delirium tremens*, and Mrs. Maynard had to be sent for. He was taken back to be nursed at Coombe Halladay.

He got better. Bertram, who was at the time staying with his father, old Dr. Bertram—a splendid specimen of an old man of eighty, walking his four or five miles a day, universally admired and liked—came over to see him, and then took him away to “The Underwoods,” Plymouth. And then Maynard went back to town and to work. After all, he could allow himself to think, it was his business to paint just as much as it was the business of that lawyer’s clerk to carry a message across the square. And it was a business happily for which he got well paid.

But not the less was the vision of that market square at Great Selwood, of the lawyer’s clerk crossing it in his jaunty way, always more or less present to Maynard’s thought; and not the less, if he could have expressed in words the full meaning of that vision, would he have said, “My occupation’s gone.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN October Herbert Vanlennert too had returned to town. This evening he was sitting once more in the solitude of his own lodgings, trying to review the past two months.

At the end of his first week at Gretton he had again seen Silvia. She and her mother stayed a week at Netley. But they were the only members of the family there. Major Forster had taken part of a moor; Crawford was also shooting in Scotland. Sir William was kept in London on some vacation business. And Lady Tennant and her daughter had only stayed a week in Derbyshire: then they too had gone north. Bertie tried to think that Silvia had been the same as ever, the four or five times that he had seen her. He tried still harder to think that her letters had been the same as before. That there was nothing strange in her not having written since early in September.

No: now he looked back, he realised what an awful holiday it had been. The first few weeks at Gretton seemed to have been made up of feverish waiting for Silvia to come back from abroad. He had written one other letter to Homburg, and that was answered by a few lines only—"We expect to be at Netley so very soon that it is not worth while to write a long letter," Silvia said. But a week, ten days passed and they had not appeared. Pride kept Bertie from writing again. He *had* pressed things too much, he reflected: Silvia had after all been chiefly passive: he must give her time, and hope. Then she had appeared and smiled upon him in her gentle way, and all pride or doubt had been smothered up for the present while in utter devotion.

He could not stay all the time at Gretton. In truth, he ought to have been with Charlie Orcher at Roundway Temple. He had paid this and another visit—to the Attewoodes, for a week. And wherever he was—so it seemed in looking back—he had been the whole while in a fever of anxiety lest Silvia should suddenly come back to Netley and he not know it. Early in September when she wrote she was very vague about their plans. They had joined the Forsters in the North: then they were to pay a visit to some people in Yorkshire, whose acquaintance, he gathered, they had made in Homburg. Were

there any young men of that new household? Who might there be along with the Forsters? Who might there be at Marmstairs House, the Duke of Donalblaine's, who had sublet half of his shooting to Major Forster? There was terror in every one of these questions.

Not but that Bertie had really had some pleasant days, days when he enjoyed his shooting or whatever was toward well enough: for a young man in his twenty-fifth year is not capable of cherishing a constant anxiety. But, ever and anon, in the midst of his enjoyment, came the haunting fear that he might be missing some irrecoverable moment, that his pride had made him too cold in his last letter to Silvia, that she might even now be being made love to by someone over there: that she might come to Netley suddenly for a day or two and he be out of the way. Then all his pleasure of the bright morning, of the dance or the game of billiards in the evening, seemed to crumble to powder.

He had so far mastered all his personal feelings as to be able to give a good deal of his time to business. Now at last he seemed to get a certain grasp of his affairs, and was really able to take the decision of some matters into his own hands.

On the whole it was with intense relief that Bertie once more found himself alone in his lodgings. Regular work was before him, he had an examination to prepare for, and at all events his duty was once more clear. He acknowledged to himself to-night that he had enjoyed his dinner—he fancied in the retrospect that he had often lost his appetite through anxiety when in Derbyshire—and he was now sitting in his easy-chair, a cigarette in one hand, a pencil in the other; an opinion which he was drafting for “Old Dodge” on his knee.

O'Brien himself brought up the *Albemarle Gazette* and laid it neatly folded on the corner of the table. But Bertie was too much occupied to say more than “Thanks.” “Ah, that's it. I've got it. It's only a contingent remainder; so that goes according to the custom of common law. The land goes by the custom of the manor. That'll make Old Dodge sit up. He thought he had stumped me this time.” . . . He went to his shelf to take down a volume of Joshua Williams *On Seizin*.

At last his eye fell upon the paper. “Just for a moment's recreation” he thought, and took it up.

“Once again the Government has blundered, and badly

blundered, in their treatment of Egyptian affairs . . . hm, hm! Yes, that's rather neat," he said, as he glanced at one of the occasional notes. . . . Then there was the libel case. . . . Shooting at Sandringham and . . . Great God! He suddenly turned pale to the lips . . . Then a voice below his immediate consciousness set to work at once to repeat to him ceaselessly—ceaselessly as the tick of a telegraph machine—"You *knew* it would be so; it's better to be out of your misery. . . . You *knew* it would be so; it's better to be out of your misery. . . ."

This is merely what Bertie had read under the heading "Personal."

"A marriage has been arranged between Silvia, daughter of Sir William Tennant, the Solicitor-General, and Sir Richard Panton, Baronet of Wrangton, North Riding, Yorkshire."

He held the paper before him and stared at it. Still the voice went on, "It is better to be out of your misery: you knew it all before." But his face was white as the face of a dead man.

Where was he? What had he been doing, going to do? Was it possible that he had been eating his dinner happily, tranquilly, only an hour ago? And looking at *Williams on Seizin* since? Yes, it must be true. There was Williams actually on his lap. Good *God*!

Then Bertie did a very wise thing. Without ever looking at the paper again—without putting anything in order—he went straight to his room, though it was only nine o'clock, undressed and went to bed.

But what a night that was! For himself he had lost all count of time. It seemed to be hours and hours since he had received that awful blow, which all the force of his will was engaged to prevent him from remembering the full nature of. But the sounds about the house, in the street below, made him realise that it was still early in the evening. Never had he been in bed so early since he was a child and was ill. He half expected Mrs. Marshall, the old housekeeper, to come in and see how he was, to tuck him up once more and give him a final kiss or bring a message from his grandfather. When he had been really ill his grandfather himself had come to see him. And for the first time for years Herbert once more brought old Mr. Vanlennert's image clearly before his mind. How brutally selfish he had been as a boy! He really scarcely seemed to *see* the people he was living with, so occupied was he with his own concerns. Ah! now he was punished—now he was all alone.

These feverish thoughts came and went. He got half confused and forgot where he was: for that other power at the back of his thought, the power of a deep-seated will, which kept at bay any clear recollection of what he had read, fevered his brain.

Howbeit, thanks to that power which prevented thought, he did drop off to sleep pretty soon.

Suddenly he awoke again. There seemed still to be sounds about the house, and he heard the banging of a hansom's doors from the front of the house. He had no idea what time it was. He seemed to have awaked from some long illness, some long stupor. But he awoke with all his senses clear. "A marriage has been arranged. . . ." It was almost as though a voice were saying that sentence in his ears at the moment he awoke. Oh, merciful, merciful Heaven! It was all true, then—not a bad dream that he must not think about—nay, it had all happened only a few hours ago. Not more than four or five at the outside. (As a matter of fact only three: for it was now midnight.) Yet in that time he felt as if his hair might have turned grey. . . .

Thus he tossed about feverishly on his bed, recalling every time that he had seen Silvia, how she had looked, what she had said.

Then he dropped off to sleep again and slept soundly. For he was young and new to grief. He awoke all dazed and bewildered. Then he remembered the paragraph, "Oh, God, have mercy!" he cried as he had never before cried in his life. And the new pain caught him by the throat. Next he heard O'Brien's step bringing him his hot water, his clothes, and two letters.

"Hope you slept well, sir," said O'Brien.

"Very, thanks," Bertie replied, instinctively pretending to yawn and draw his hand down his face in order to hide as far as possible his haggard eyes. Then he saw the two letters which O'Brien was laying down beside him, and his face behind his hand turned pale, and he fell a-trembling. "Ah, the paragraph, the paragraph!" It all swept upon him again as O'Brien closed the door behind him. He seized the letters. One was in Silvia's hand. Might there not after all be some tremendous mistake and she be writing to tell him so? Imagination at once rushed to the opposite extreme and pictured her writing in such a way as to show Bertie that, that . . . it was him and

only him she cared for. And in the moment only of breaking the seal the scene in Lady St. Maurice's conservatory came back before him.

Yes, that must be it. And, before unfolding the letter, he made a half-conscious vow, such as a Catholic might have made, that he would offer the heavenly powers any bribe that this might indeed be the case.

But the first words of the actual letter showed him that his bribe had not been accepted. Silvia's letter was only a short one. She gave in it the same information as that which he had got from the *Albemarle*. She said in the course of it, "I wish I could have done what you wished, and tried to do so, for I have always liked you so much, and wish to be your friend always. Forgive me, dear Mr. Vanlennert, if I have given you any pain. I am afraid I ought to have written to you sooner to say that I had found that what you asked me was impossible. But we were never engaged, you know, and I thought that perhaps, after a little more thought, you might yourself have come to think the same thing. . . ."

The other letter was from Molly. She came less directly to the point. After a few preliminary enquiries, she wrote:

"Lady Tennant and Silvia have been here again since you left. They only stayed a week, and I scarcely saw anything of them. I was so sorry at first that Silvia should have come while you were away, but now I am glad. For, dear Bertie, I know you are very fond of her, though you have never talked to me about it. I hope you won't be angry with me for saying this once. I could not help feeling then that Silvia is changed towards all of us. She did ask after you very kindly, though. After they had left, Mr. Orcher heard a rumour that she was engaged, and now I am afraid there is no doubt about it; it is to somebody in Yorkshire, where Lady Tennant and she have been staying. I am so sorry. You won't like my condoling with you, I know, nor saying what a *fool* I think she is. But I must say it all the same. It makes me wretched to think that people should throw away such happiness as she might have had. Do you mind very much, dear Bertie? I am afraid you do. But I know you are very brave, and will fight your way through it."

It was such a letter as a woman writes who has never been in love. Bertie was grateful, but he felt there was no help there.

Oh, God, where was there help to be looked for? "Oh,

have mercy!" he cried once more, as he jumped out of bed. "Frailty, thy name is woman; thy name is . . . Oh God, what was I going to do? . . . Oh, yes, my bath. Where's the sponge? Frailty, thy name . . . She could not have meant nothing *then*. . . . Thy name is woman. . . . What do I do with the sponge? Oh God, oh, God, what *am* I to do? Damn it, what a fool I am! I've left the towels at the other end of the room. 'I know you will be brave and fight your way through.' Just the sort of thing an outsider . . . Damn it, damn it, and curse it!" For he had pulled too sharply at the towel, and the towel-horse came down with it. . . . "Damn and curse; my usual luck!" This time he had kicked with his bare toe sharply against the side of the bath. "By Jove, how infernally it hurts, damn it, damn it, and damn it! . . . Curse me, what a cur I am! I'll be damned if I don't stand up against it. Yes, by God, I *will*. I'm the most miserable chap in London. But, at any rate, I am a man."

Thereat he made a vigorous effort to assert his will, and the clouds lifted for a moment, the cause of his trouble was partly forgotten in the effort to suppress the voice of the trouble itself. But a minute afterwards the clouds rolled down again. "There was to come some reward for this effort, I know; what was it?" "Why, what reward can there possibly be," answered memory, becoming clear once more. "A marriage has been arranged . . ." Silvia's letter, the newspaper paragraph, flashed back, in all their original intensity. "Oh, no reward possible; no relief possible! Oh, God, what am I to do? . . . Frailty, thy name . . . Hell! where is the bell?" And *da capo* rolling on through a thousand years of misery, while the minute hand made a few jerks upon the face of his watch.

In the next room O'Brien appeared once more upon the scene with his breakfast

"The weather seems to have quite taken up again now, does it *not*, sir?" Bertie came to himself to hear his landlord saying. Then he lost some more. . . . "Mr. Kynnersley's just come back from Yorkshire, I 'ear, sir."

"Oh, really," said Bertie, abstractedly, pretending to search for something that had slipped into his sock, in order not to meet O'Brien's eye.

Buzz—buzz—"Yes, at 'Omburg, so I understand, sir. Quite an event for him, they say, to go to any foreign place like that, I understand. . . ."

"Homburg! Oh, curse you!" Bertie nearly called out. *She* had gone to Homburg. Perhaps it was there . . .

Buzz, buzz . . . "Did you say that you would require lunch, sir? Mrs. O'Brien thought perhaps you would like . . ."

"No, thank you. Oh, yes, I should . . . (Oh, why must I be troubled to decide? . . . Is he gone? Frailty, thy name is . . . Am I going mad? I shall go mad if I don't stop this . . .")

In this fashion the whole day had to be gone through, and the next after that. His passion, being indeed a thing cradled in the air, seemed to have only grown on him with time, and even with the absence of his lady. Throughout the most commonplace of his daily experiences a shadowy Silvia, born of the imagination, had stood beside him. Did a boot-lace break or his gloves get mislaid, he unconsciously appealed to this unsubstantial presence. And since he had felt more sure of her, there had been exquisite moments when the unseen one had laid her cheek against his and had kissed his lips. Even now the shadowy being haunted him; still he unthinkingly appealed to it. But now it was a Pygmalion's statue gone back to her elemental marble, and remained irresponsive. God! Was it possible that all that had been was dead, dead, dead! So may a disciple have felt at Golgotha when he saw the stone rolled to the mouth of the sepulchre and his beloved Master hidden away forever.

"Oh, God, can't you help me?" he cried, with the *naïve* faith of a savage. "Can't you help me, or is it that you won't?"

There was no use staying at home, none, none, none. He got out to walk away his sorrow. Through Jermyn Street, up the Haymarket, then north. On past Oxford Street to the shabby region of Marylebone Road he went. Only now and again he awoke to any perception of where he was going.

The weather had become fine once more. It was, indeed, the Indian summer of the middle days of October. Yet London gained only part of the benefit of the change. A sort of blight seemed to hang in the air; the smoke could not lift, and the sun shone down like an angry Titan, not like a kind divinity. All the leaves in the squares and parks were shrivelled, and the grass was turned to dust. Work was slack, and the streets were thronged with an unusual number of working-men, who leant about against railings, smoked pipes together at street corners, and appeared in crowds whenever occurred an

accident of the most ordinary kind. In every street, almost, Bertie met melancholy processions—a man holding perhaps a little boy or girl by the hand, a woman just behind carrying a baby and leading another child. The children jerked and pulled, and turned round, kicked at any object in their reach, and would fain have made the most of their journey through the streets. But the man and the woman walked straight on, looking neither to the right nor to the left. When the children grew weary of trying to divert themselves, they looked up at their parents and were awed into stillness, and went along whimpering; while still the father and mother took no more notice of them than before. Each of these groups was a household stone-broke by the hard times, and now on its way to the workhouse.

All this silent misery affected Bertie—not with pity, but with horror; and the horror only grew when he realised that these sights did not soften his heart or make him less occupied with his own grief. “Everything in the world is wretched,” he thought. “There is no Providence overhead, no faith, no hope, no charity; all are dead, dead, dead.” He did not formulate this negative creed in words. But this was the burden of his secret thoughts, as he trudged wearily along.

He had turned south, and now entered the Park by the Marble Arch. Here were more of the unemployed, lying upon the grass or standing in small groups round a socialist agitator here, a street preacher there. Vague fragments of their oratory reached Bertie. “’E says it plainly enough. These are ’is very words . . .” How it jarred! “What do you know about God?” said the unformulated thought of the new-born sceptic.

Where was he? Getting near Achilles. Scarcely a soul about here, in the very part where a month or two ago he might have been walking—some Sunday, say—his heart growing tight and his eyes glistening at the expectation of meeting . . . “Oh, damn it! I won’t . . .”

Instead, a group of ragged children were playing round a tree.

“’Ere, Polly, ’ere’s the door. . . . ’Ere I’ve made a door,” a lank girl called out, with shrill emphasis. “’Ow silly yer are, Polly! This is the door. ’Ere, then, Jemmy, you come in then, since she’s ser silly. . . . Why don’t yer?”

And the eagerness of the creator bruised itself, as it always does, against the indifference of the world.

CHAPTER XXV.

HERBERT VANLENNERT pulled himself together as well as he could. He set to work again reading for his final, and went back to Doderidge's chambers. The last was the worst part of his duties. Every human being was hateful to him at this time. Yet he had to try and look as he ordinarily looked. It was possible to do this for half an hour or so at the club, when he felt equal to going there, or even by a great effort to sit through a dinner on the rare occasions when at this time of year he had to give or accept an invitation. But to go day after day and try and make jokes with the other three pupils—that was torture.

"Vanlennert's as dull as ditch-water," said Ricketts, "worse than he was before the vacation. There's no doubt about it, he must be gone on some girl." Ricketts was a short, stout man, with a good-natured, rather pimply face, and a moustache stretching with a wide curve over his upper lip.

"That's just what it is, I fancy," said the smarter Alleyne, who, like Vanlennert, was an Etonian and belonged to the same club as Herbert. "He seems to have got the complaint rather badly. Vanlennert's such an innocent: that's what's the matter with him. There are plenty more fish in the sea. Those fellows never think of that. I tell you what I should like to do, Ricketts, take him about and shake him up a little. That first blush of innocence doesn't suit the present day."

"You're right. It's just those unfortunate virgins who never can make themselves agreeable to any woman." Ricketts believed that he was rather a lady-killer. "Women don't like being taken in that spirit. They'd far rather, if the truth were told, be treated as dairymaids than as goddesses."

"And quite right, too."

"All the same, I don't think you'll ever persuade Vanlennert to try his hand on the dairymaid as a preparation for the goddess."

"Well, I mean to have a try some of these days. I know just the sort of girl who would suit him, Flossie Armour. She has just that sort of æsthetic look, you know, that will touch his soul. She'd stuff Vanlennert up with some history invented on the spur of the moment, how she was the daughter of a clergyman and a governess. . . ."

"Yes, that's the sort of thing . . . and fell a victim to a diabolical guardsman. It's terrible to think what our household troops have to answer for. It would be a lark turning a girl like that on to Vanlennert. But how would you set about it? It ought to come as a perfect accident, oughtn't it?"

"Well, if we were to go with him to the theatre and arrange they should have places next to ours. How would that do?"

"Or take him up the river and meet them quite by chance somewhere. It's too late for that perhaps."

"Oh, there are lots of ways. It really would be rather a lark and a genuine kindness to him, I swear."

But Vanlennert shunned society, and gave no opening to the designs of his friends. And yet to sit alone in his rooms became unbearable, so that he began to have almost no occupation for his leisure moments by day or night than tramping, tramping continually over the London pavement. He felt as if some fiend of remembrance were pursuing him, always on the point of overtaking him, yet by times to be eluded a little in this way. And he came back so utterly exhausted that he fell asleep directly he got into bed.

Fine or wet made no difference. He saw the long rows of lamps reflect themselves in the sooty pools in front of him; saw the draggled pedestrians pass like mean shadows from light to darkness; and from what he saw constructed a hundred scenes of aimless wretchedness such as a great city encloses. Out of each cup of misery it was as if a drop were distilled to add to his own portion.

Yet for how slight a cause? For the sake of a girl no better than a hundred others—unless good looks make of themselves a virtue—of whose merits and defects he in fact knew very little; therefore not for a girl at all, rather for a creature of his own imagination. He half understood this. How often had he remembered what Bertram had once said about the Eternal Feminine and about women who represented that having no character! At any rate he *thought* that was what Bertram had said. Could that be why he loved Silvia so entirely? He could not think clearly. In truth, he was now so steeped in grief that he often ceased to fully recognise the cause of his sorrow. It was not now always of the loss of Silvia that he thought, but of the hollowness of life and this eternal round. . . . He accused God and almost cursed man, though he pitied him.

The first faint gleam of sunlight came in the form of curiosity. He had learnt little of London hitherto: his life had been so fully occupied. He had lived among his set, seen the things they saw, the streets in which they lived; and Silvia had been the focus round which all his thoughts revolved. There was no back current of existence with Vanlennert as there is with many young men, dragging him into experiences and scenes strangely unlike those of the ordered respectable houses which are supposed to give them all they know of "society."

At the beginning of his perambulations Bertie's legs carried him whither they would. He himself never seemed to change his place, or at any rate his surroundings. Like one upon a lonely road—

"Who having once looked round, walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread"—

he had pressed on only to escape from his despairs.

But gradually he awoke to find himself in regions that he had never visited before, walking perhaps under the frowning gate of Clerkenwell or along the endless Gray's Inn Road, till there burst on him a new London in the north, with its shops, with its theatre, its immense flaring public-houses, its crowds thronging the pavement.

Or after passing for hours, as it seemed, through the fashionable parts of the West End, walking down Piccadilly or Oxford Street, or again through squares of magnificent houses cold as mausoleums in their autumnal deadness, he would suddenly emerge amid streets and streets, a very labyrinth of little houses, each one with the same little portico and little bay-window, and the same two low storeys above, often with a tiny patch of garden in front; little houses which were both comfortable and shabby, neat and yet, to the practised eye, with a certain air of rakishness about them.

Thus there awoke in Bertie's mind a wonder to find how much larger London was than he supposed, and a curiosity as to how much more there might be to see, and to what phases of life corresponded all these different externals.

One night passing down one of the meaner kind of little portico-housed streets he became aware of a man and a woman whom he was rapidly catching up.

The man was tall and thin but tolerably strong-looking, and he was walking with an unsteady step just behind a fat woman.

"You b— b—" Bertie heard him saying, "I'm pretty b— well sick of you, I am." Then a string of further oaths followed.

The woman was hurrying on—not quite steadily, perhaps, she either. She carried a parcel in her hand and made no reply. The man seemed to grow more exasperated by her silence. . . . At last he snatched the parcel away from her, threw it on the ground, and stamped upon it.

Then she turned round upon him.

"You dirty pig, you. You'd leave me to starve in the streets, you would. Yes, you're a b— pig, you are. . . ."

"You b— w—" the man said. They had approached their gate now. Bertie had relaxed his steps a little, so as not to pass them. The man seemed to be steadying himself to give vent to his rage later on. "I'll teach you," he said, in a dull, threatening way, as he stood at the garden gate. "You just come inside, you——" He held the little gate open for her, with a sort of ghastly politeness, "I'll teach you; that's all."

The woman seemed to be really scared. No doubt this kind of half-sobriety was ominous.

"What have I done, Tom? What's the matter with you?" she said, half tearfully.

"You'll soon find out what you done. Only come 'nside, that's all."

The woman stood still irresolute.

"Do you 'ear me?" He gave a hiccup, "W-will you come in or won't you?" Now that he had dropped his foul language he did not speak quite like a working-man.

Bertie went up to the woman. "Are you afraid of this man?" he said.

"Now, 'oo are you, young gentleman?" the man said from inside the gate. He spoke with sarcastic suavity, hiccuping as he did so. "This lady is my wife. P'r-aps you d-don't know that. Is this gentleman a friend of yours?"

"Never see 'im before in my life, s'elp me Gawd," answered the woman.

"Then if I w-was you, young gentleman, I wouldn't interfere between a gentleman and his wife. . . . Well, are you coming in, or are you not? That's all!"

"Yes, Tom, I'm coming in," said the woman, beginning to whimper.

Bertie walked away profoundly disgusted. With what? "With the sordid scene," he replied to his conscience. "Not altogether that," answered conscience.

"After all it's no affair of mine. If the woman wanted my help she could have had it."

But his conscience came down suddenly with a thunderstroke. "You're afraid," it said. "All your misery instead of making you brave, has made you a coward, a weaker creature than you were before. What is there to be afraid of? Could anything make you more wretched than you are now?"

He had got to the end of the street by this time. He turned and walked back again. The house was now quiet enough, just like any other house in the row. What possible excuse could there be for going into it?

"This," said conscience: "that you *know* there's a man beating a woman inside. He might kill her."

"By Jove, it's true. All that I've gone through has made me a funk," Bertie said to himself. "Now I've got nothing to lose, everything seems to threaten me. But I'll be hanged if I funk this thing any way."

The low bay-window faced him; behind it hung lace curtains: behind these was absolute darkness, so that the reflection of the street lamp on the panes seemed to have a sinister cynical intention, as though it said, "Well, if there is a man beating his wife somewhere in the house, so there is behind a hundred other street doors as quiet and as respectable as this." There were about six yards of garden between the gate and the porch; and when Bertie had reached the steps of the latter it seemed not possible to go farther. But, yes; listening attentively he heard a muffled cry, and he could even fancy he caught the sound of blows. He mounted the steps. A faint light came through the fan-light above the door. If only that blank window had not looked so impenetrably dark and cold! Now again, however, yes—he distinctly heard blows falling and a wailing sound. He opened the door and entered. Dim as was the light which came from a dirty paraffin lamp it dazzled him for a moment: a strong smell of paraffin assailed his nostrils, and added at once to his sense of disgust and strangeness. He began to feel as if he had got into some fantastic dream.

The first things he distinguished were two figures standing by the door of a room. *They* were not fighting at any rate. Beyond that fact he took in scarcely anything more about them than that they were women; that one was bare-headed and one

wore a hat. But now from the inner room he could hear quite plainly a sound of dull continued blows that turned him sick. Why, a man might kill a woman like that! That very sense of sickness weakened him for a moment morally as well as physically. Then his gall rose at himself and at the tyrant on the other side of the door.

"What's the matter?" he said.

"I dunno. 'E's cotched 'er out on the daunce, I s'pose. 'Oo, are you, my dear?"

"'Old your tongue, Minnie, and speak civil to the gentleman," said the girl without the hat. She was the taller of the two, light-haired and pale and dressed in black; that was all he noticed.

"Well, I must stop it," said Bertie, moving towards the door.

"You'd better not," said the girl called Minnie, and she moved between him and the door.

"You'd better not, sir," said the other.

"Tom's a narsty one when 'e's like that, ain't 'e, Annie?"

But Bertie had pushed past them and opened the door.

The room into which he looked was small and inconveniently crowded with furniture. Bertie preserved for a long time the general impression that he received on entering the room—the impression of a square table with a red check table-cloth, of a green sofa whose white cotton stuffing bulged out from gaps in the American-cloth cover. Between the table and the sofa was standing a man whose back was turned to Bertie. And to the latter the sight was the more disgusting that he could not see quite what the man was doing. Only from beyond him came the same continuous inarticulate noise, half babbling and half screaming.

"What the *devil* are you doing?" said Bertie, the blood rushing to his face and all fear leaving him.

The man turned suddenly round and stared for a moment, half dazed. Then he recovered himself.

"Who the hell are you, you b—?" he roared out.

"I'll show you who I am," said Bertie, grinding his teeth. "You leave that woman alone."

But still in spite of his rage the scene seemed so strangely unsubstantial that he had to make an effort of will to remember what he had intended to do. The man's voice came to him as if from a distance, though he was now quite close.

"You get out of my 'ouse, you b— b—."

For answer Bertie struck out with all his force and caught

the man on the jaw-bone. He staggered back but did not fall, and the blow seemed to sober him.

"Oh, my Christ! I'll do for you, God *damn* me if I don't!" But the man had stepped back a pace and the edge of the table was between the two.

Meanwhile, to Herbert's astonishment, the woman had got up quite unassisted from the floor. She was round and fat, her face curiously mottled between a deep pink and a pasty white: and her eyes looked without seeing. Whether this was an effect of drink or of the blows that she had received it was impossible to say. One lock of her black hair hung down beside her cheek and gave her a mænad-like aspect, and, what was unmistakable, a thin line of blood ran down beneath it and oozed into her collar. It was horrid: yet for all that it seemed commonplace. What was phantasmal and not commonplace was that he, Herbert Vanlennert, should be in the midst of it.

"Oh-h. So you come poking your blooming nose into a gentleman's 'ouse, do you? Well, 'old 'ard till I take my coat off, you b— fine b—."

"'Old 'ard, Tom, it's a gentleman you see," said the woman from behind.

"Gentleman or no gentleman I'm just going . . ."

"Why don't you go away at once?" said a voice at Bertie's elbow. "You'll only bring the police on us." He turned round instinctively to see who was speaking, and at that very moment a heavy blow struck the side of his face. The table rose up as if to embrace him, the walls swung round and then closed in. He had a vague half vision of the sofa gaping open close to his eyes: then he felt another blow on his leg and all was dark.

"Well, 'e was a fool. But 'e don't look 'alf narsty lying there."

"Poor feller. 'Ush, Minnie, 'e's coming to."

Bertie opened his eyes and found himself lying on a bed, a very neat white bed in a very tidy room. The girl in a black dress was seated beside it, and the girl in the hat and jacket stood at the lower end. But he had a violent pain in his head and felt he could not move.

Presently the door opened and a husky woman's voice said. "'E's all right, I s'pose." There was a note of fear in her voice which she tried to cover by an air of assurance. "Tom's that 'eady sometimes; 'll get 'isself into trouble one of these days. . . . I'm sure I 'ope you're better, sir," she went on in a

more deferential tone of voice, as she saw Bertie's eyes were open, "and that you won't make no trouble about this. My 'usband's terrible 'eadstrong s'm'times: and I 'hown 'e'd 'ad a drop morn't good for him."

She slurred her words the least bit. But instead of the mænad look which she had worn before, to Bertie's astonishment her dress and hair were faultlessly neat. There was an air o' truculent respectability in her mottled face and small sharp eyes.

Bertie now raised himself on the bed. But the room swam round and he had to lie down again.

"Don't 'urry to git up," Mrs. Tucker went on in more assured tones, as if the concession were all on her side. "Stay where you *hare* a bit, sir. There's no 'urry not in the world. I'm sure Miss Gray won't mind your st'ying there a bit; will you, my dear?"

"Ho, no. The gentleman's welcome to stay as long as hever he likes, I'm sure," said Miss Gray, mincing and bridling.

"I'll take care of 'im if she won't," said the other girl called Minnie, in a sort of stage whisper, but in her natural tones.

"I don't know what you want doing 'ere at all, Miss Seymour, I'm sure," said the landlady, with great dignity. "We brought you in, sir, when you felled down, sir," she went on to Bertie. "My 'usband 'e tumbled against you, you see, sir, and pushed you hover as I may say, and I suppose your 'ead struck on some piece of furnisher, for you seemed to fall stun-like. So Miss Gray, this young lady, she says. 'If you was to lie 'im'n my bed, Mrs. Tucker, sh' says, for a minute or two. . . .'"

Mrs. Tucker was still going on talking, but her figure seemed to have retreated along with that of the girl at the foot of the bed to a distance of at least a hundred yards. And out of the remote distance came the following dialogue:

"That's right, my dear, give 'im a glass of water. . . . Well, I'm sure you've no call to stay 'ere, Miss Seymour." And then in a lower voice, "Come hout, Minnie, do, and give Annie a charnce. You're always trying to take heverybody away from 'er, and she's that soft. . . ."

"I shan't: get out yourself," was answered in just the tone which a girl at a National School uses in speaking to one of her fellows. But for all that Minnie went out of the room with Mrs. Tucker.

The opposite wall came back again. Bertie made a vigorous

effort, raised himself on one elbow and swung his legs to the floor. The girl in black was still standing between him and the light, holding a glass of water in her hand. She didn't say anything. Bertie took the glass with a "Thanks, very much." Thereupon she retired to the little bay-window, and there under the lamp she occupied herself in arranging a piece of silk on her sewing-machine. Bertie noticed with shame that his boots had made a dirty mark on the bed which was particularly neat and clean. Next to the bed was a double wash-hand-stand, and on the opposite side of the room, beyond the door, a chest of drawers surmounted by a mirror; and then, quite in the bay of the window, stood the sewing-machine. The blinds of the room were drawn down, and a paraffin lamp shed a pleasant glow upon the farther end where the girl in black was sitting.

"'Ope you feel a little better now, sir," she said, without looking up.

"Where? . . . a . . . Let me see . . . Oh, I got hit, didn't I?"

"Yes, sir; hold Tucker, 'e's wild-like when 'e's hon the boo—drink. The way 'e'll treat that poor Mrs. Tucker is shameful sometimes, it is. But it's not like 'im to do a thing like that all the same. 'E didn't see 'oo it was I expict. That's about what it was?" Her pronunciation was exceedingly mincing.

She was rather attractive; not above the middle height, but slim and well-proportioned. Her hands, which were busy with the machine, were better shaped than is the case with most girls of the working classes, and were much less rough than a seamstress's hands might be expected to be. If her hair and face were very much of one pale hue, the former shone pleasantly with a hundred different points of light in the lamplight. A crystal brilliant sparkled in her ear and another on her right hand.

Bertie felt a pain in one hand, and looking down, saw that he had cut the back of it, and that the blood had trickled down between his third and fourth fingers. Instinctively he got up and went to the washstand, and as he did so realised for the first time that he was in a girl's bedroom. He realised the situation with peculiar vividness when he saw the two ewers and basins, and then for the first time he noticed that the bed likewise was a double one. As he took in these things he blushed all over his face and neck.

Miss Gray was pretending to be busy with her work at the window. But she kept an eye upon Bertie, and even in the bad light she saw how he was blushing and made her own inward comments.

Then she frowned with annoyance. For the door opened, and Miss Seymour reappeared. She had laid aside her hat. Her hair was very elaborately curled on her forehead and brushed forward over her ears, and these as well as neck and forehead were of a more delicate whiteness than belongs by nature to girls of her class and culture. Her eyes shone brightly between double rows of dark lashes.

"I'm sure I 'ope you're better, sir?" she said.

"Yes, thanks," said Bertie. He was thinking how he could get away. But at the same time he felt dizzy again now he had got up, and his head hurt dully. He had to sit down again for a minute.

"Well, I'm sure I never 'eard of such a thing," Miss Seymour went on, "did you?" (This to Miss Gray.) "To strike a gentleman like that. 'Hif it warn't for poor Mrs. Tucker I'd say it would serve 'im just raight if you was to summons 'im. Wouldn't you, Hannie?"

But Annie only bridled and busied herself with her sewing.

Her friend gave a laugh and came over and sat on the bed close to Bertie.

"She's 'umped. She don't think I've no business in 'ere; do you, Hannie? But I don't see what right she has to 'ave you all to hussell?" and Minnie turned her eyes on the stranger in a very alluring manner. "At all events you can tyke your choice between us. You are a pretty feller, I must s'y." But as she saw that Bertie looked anything but pleased, she went on in a more "lady-like" tone. "I dares'y you think me very bold, don't you, now? But I should like . . ."

Here, however, Miss Gray broke in.

"I wonder you haren't ashymed of yourself, Miss Seymour, speaking to a gentleman like that. One would think you was a bad gurl out of the streets." She spoke with such an exceeding primness and air of virtue that her bold stroke—played quite instinctively—produced its effect. Minnie was spurred into not being outdone in the affectation of lady-likeness, and when she spoke again it was as if she had become a new individual.

"Well, I'm sure if I m'yn't come to see 'ow the gentleman's getting on! I should like to know what 'arm there is in that?"

She spoke in answer to her friend, but she looked at Bertie all the while.

"Oh, I'm all right again, thanks," he said, getting up once more. "I think . . . I wonder if I could get a cab or anything."

A very low dialogue was going on between the other two. He caught the whispered words, "You are a beast." . . . "What good will you get, I'd like to know?"

Suddenly Miss Seymour became more good-natured to her friend.

"I'll go and get you a cab, sir?" she said.

"No. But I'm awfully obliged to you," Bertie began. But she had left the room.

"She don't mean no 'arm," said Miss Gray, when her friend had gone. "But she forgits 'erself dreadfully sometimes, Minnie does. It's not all lydylike the way she goes on."

Bertie was wholly preoccupied with the thought of whether he should offer these girls any money and how he was to do it.

"Well, I'm grateful to her for going for the cab, and still more to you," he began. . . .

"Oh, don't name it, sir, please," said Miss Gray, casting her eyes down. "I'm sure I'm only too thankful it's been no worse. It was dreadful to see you go down like you did, sir. It really frightened me more than I ever was in my life." And here she raised her pale grey eyes to Bertie's face with a look at once of sympathy and of perfect innocence. She seemed at last to have found her tongue.

"I should like to . . ." the other went on, sticking desperately to his point ("I wish to the deuce I knew exactly what sort these girls are. The other one looked a bad lot," he said to himself,) "to . . . you've had a lot of bother and, and expense." Though he could not have told where the expense came in, he chose this word as a suggestive one, and as he uttered it he put his hand into his waistcoat pocket.

That, then, was to be the end of all—of what seemed a real piece of luck thrown in her way. Annie felt so annoyed (all the more that she found Bertie's face very attractive and was not without her instinct of romance) that she coloured all over a pale pink and tears came into her eyes.

"Oh, no, I couldn't, sir," she said, not without a certain dignity; "I couldn't—that way."

Bertie felt horribly snubbed. At that moment the cab came to the door. "Well, you must let me . . . send you some little present. . . . Is there anything . . ." he began.

Here came in Miss Seymour breathless, pleased with herself for her good-nature. She looked a moment at the two and saw the awkwardness which was on both. Then behind Bertie's back she put out her tongue at her friend.

"'Ere's your cab, sir," she said, in her hearty way. "You lean on me; you're not 'alf strong yet *I* can see," and she gave Bertie her arm. Miss Gray in rather an ineffectual way did the same on the other side. Bertie was obliged to accept; for now he began to walk again his head swam more than ever and he could scarcely see. He had only a very vague impression of what he was doing.

"Never mind 'ow 'ard you press; I like it."

These words from Miss Seymour were the last that he remembered before finding himself on his way home in the cab.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HERBERT VANLENNERT, still in a state of half stupor, was driven home. A sensation of drizzling rain in his face—no one having thought of putting the glass down—made the last scene in the horrid farce which all this evening's adventure came to be for him, when he got quite well; for he had had a slight concussion of the brain and was obliged to keep the house for some days. Of all the phantasy what seemed most fantastic were the two appearances of Mrs. Tucker, first as a squalid mænad with blood trickling down her neck, then as the aggressively respectable landlady who came to look at him as he lay on Annie Gray's bed. These two appearances divided his reminiscences into two parts. The first was a squalid nightmare which he never thought of willingly. But the second part glowed in his memory with a mild and peaceful light, the light of a paraffin lamp shining down upon Annie Gray's pale hair and deft white fingers plying a sewing-machine.

And when he was again quite on his legs a debate began within him whether he ought or ought not to go back and see that girl once more and make her some return for her kindness. He remembered the present which he had *not* given her. Yes—clearly he must do something about that. He had hurt her feelings as it was. Should he go himself, or only send her a

present in a letter? That would be to give his name and address among rather a doubtful set: Mrs. Tucker and the other girl, Miss Seymour, might get hold of the letter. "Then write and give no address," said Common-sense. "And give her no opportunity of saying, 'Thank you.' That would be caddish." She had done him nothing but good, and how gentle and womanly she had looked as she bent over her work! This was an odd direction for the thoughts of the Squire of Netley to run in. But there are times when the supreme needs of our nature assert themselves across all barriers. The vision of the girl seen in Adelaide Street had never quite gone from Herbert Vanlennert's memory, nor the strange and sudden pity which that sight evoked for all who were desolate and oppressed. He was abundantly desolate now.

"Lord, sir, I never thought to see you again!" It was Miss Gray herself who came to the door. She had seen him from her window as he walked up the steps. She wore a pink blush as she spoke. "I 'ope you're quite well again now, sir."

She looked so humble and so awkward, and yet not plain at all, that she more than ever suggested the Adelaide Street girl to Bertie. Miss Gray led him this time not into her room, but into the little back parlour, the scene of the conflict. In what a horrible, ludicrous light the whole came back upon him! Meanwhile his hostess was again speaking. "I was so vexed when I remembered we'd not told 'im to put it down. 'He'll get drenched before he gets 'ome, I said to Miss Seymour.'" And this speech led her on to remark upon the weather. Nothing could have been more intensely proper—proper to banality—than Miss Gray's conversation.

Meanwhile, Bertie could but notice sympathetically the girl's paleness and the leanness of her figure beneath its black dress. Some lines of a modern poet were half in his memory about the pale working-girl being a rebuke to the girl of another sort. How unjust his momentary suspicions were! But then the other, Miss Seymour? Even of her one could not tell.

"I—I came to bring you a little present—this brooch." He brought it out quickly, fearing that the girl might think he had come to bring her money and be hurt again.

Again Miss Gray coloured faintly all over. "I'm sure it's very kind of you," she said, without excitement.

"I wonder if it offends her, giving her a brooch. I can't see why it should," he thought.

But when Miss Gray got the little case and saw from the silk lining and the name stamped thereon that it was a piece of real jewellery, her feelings changed altogether. It was the first article of real gold that she had ever possessed. Once more she coloured and tears came into her eyes. She became natural for the first time.

"It is good of you, sir," and by a momentary impulse she held out her hand and then withdrew it as quickly. Bertie out of a polite instinct held out his, but it went no farther than to touch her fingers. A certain roughness in the fingers made him in his own despite remember the social difference between them. Then he felt like a beast.

"You're a—a—dressmaker, aren't you?" he said, in his kindest voice.

"Yes, sir." Annie gave one darting glance.

"Do you have to work long hours?"

"Mostly from eight in the morning to eight at night, sir."

"Dear me. That's a tremendously long time."

"Yes. It's pretty long, sir. And they don't give you very long to your meals neither." Annie warmed to her description as she went on. "If you set there talking, if it's only two minutes beyond the 'alf hour the forewoman she comes round and she says, 'Miss Gray, 'ere you hare again,' she says, 'setting hover time.'"

Here, however, Miss Gray stopped suddenly; for she remembered that at this moment it was not quite six. "That's when there's regular full work at the place of business, you understand, sir."

"But I suppose you are not at full work now," said Bertie, who likewise recognised that eight o'clock was still some way off.

"No, not now, sir. . . . At least it's like this," she went on: "sometimes you go to the place of business and sometimes they give you a job to take and do at 'ome."

"Well, I ought not to keep you from your work."

"Oh, don't name it, sir."

"Only I thought I'd like to call and thank you for what you did. . . ." And Bertie voluntarily held out his hand this time.

"I'm sure you're most kind, sir," said Annie, as she put her hand in his. "I'll never forget 'ow kind you've been to a pore working-girl," she added.

"Perhaps—perhaps I'll look in again some day to see how you're getting on."

"Oh, if you *would*, sir."

The restraint which Miss Gray was obliged to put upon herself was making her feel slightly hysterical. She did not know whether she was most inclined to laugh or cry. But the effect was the same, so far as her visitor was concerned. He saw that there were tears in her eyes and he was touched. Who was he—the most miserable man in London—not to take the opportunity of doing a little kindness when it was possible? Yes. He would come again.

Then Miss Gray showed him out. "You *hare* a good feller," she said to herself, following him with her eyes as he walked down the steps.

At the gate Bertie met the girl in the flowery hat, who smiled and stared at him familiarly.

"You've been to see Annie, I suppose," she said. But the other made no reply.

"Well," said Miss Seymour, as she reached the door at which Miss Gray was still standing. "The soft 'ead's come back hafter all. I didn't think he was going to. 'Ow much 'as 'e given you for . . ."

Annie blazed into sudden passion.

"'Old your tongue, Minnie!" she cried. "I don't want to 'ear none of your narstiness."

The shock which Bertie had received spread out wider and wider ripples over his consciousness, changing all his views of life, disturbing him in remote regions of his moral being where before everything had been at rest.

How hideous it was to see everybody going their own way as if nothing had happened—no sympathy to be got from any human being! This complaint might have seemed unreasonable to an outsider: for Herbert never confided his trouble to anyone. Misery has no logic. There ought to be some way by which his fellow-creatures could come to his aid, if their common humanity meant anything: some miraculous way by which his appeal was conveyed to them, by which they really understood the needs of his case. For he knew that no mere words could express the blackness which enveloped him. That was it. There ought to be some miracle wrought for one in such a strait: Heaven ought to interfere—or it ought to *have* interfered. If the heavenly powers were real it was just over the hearts of men and women that they ought to have control:

control over Silvia's heart to prevent such a wrong being done him who had never done anyone any harm.

Herbert had accepted the religion he had been brought up in, in all its general principles at any rate. But now when he tried to apply it, when he looked up to Heaven for help, all seemed cold and silent. One day it flashed across him with a sudden chill that people who like the Ayntrees or like Bradshaw professed not to believe in a God really did not. The bare possibility of taking them seriously had never occurred to him. And with the mere possibility of this blank Atheism the reality of the Deity seemed to grow pale. He was utterly unused to philosophic doubts: metaphysics were uncongenial to his nature, though he had just glanced into that study for a moment's pastime as into so many other things. Now that a leakage had begun, a whole flood of vague doubts poured in, doubts of Providence, of moral law, a suspicion of the universal selfishness of mankind.

Meantime the year had gone on. All the regular Londoners had come back to town, and though society in the more fashionable sense did not exist, there were plenty of friends and acquaintance to be seen, and Bertie went about his old life just as before, only more absently and with dark shadows under his eyes.

It was one yellow November afternoon, one of the usual Saturday afternoons, that Herbert Vanlennert found himself in Bertram's chambers. Lawes was there, and was drawing Bertram out upon the subject of *Unconscious Will*, the name of a quasi-philosophical book just published by an English psychologist. He was only doing this, Bertie knew, in order to save himself the trouble of reading the book for review. Bertram himself saw this quite as clearly perhaps; but not the less he gave a perfectly luminous account of the facts and theories of the book, of the general theory of Will in Nature. And now he had passed on to contrast the modern form of this last idea with that of Plato.

"Of course the teleological question is the root distinction between the two," he said.

"Teleology is just the invention of the schoolmen," said Lawes, who knew little more than the phrases of abstract science.

"Nonsense," said Bertram; "Bembridge only gets his de-

ductions, as most people do, by a trick of language. It's a proof as old as the hills. Will and Causality are born in us."

"That is to say, they are anthropomorphic."

"Everything is anthropomorphic."

"No, science is not."

"Science is, because the foundation of science is; the foundation of science is causality."

The two other people in the room, Herbert Vanlennert and Violet Fisher, listened with equal impatience to this discussion, though for not identical reasons. At last the former felt so oppressed by his thoughts that he was obliged to speak.

"What good do you expect to get by all that?" he said, suddenly, in an almost peevish tone.

"By what?" said Bertram, astonished.

"By all those metaphysics you go in for. I don't see what they lead to."

It sounded rather a boyish sentiment. Lawes gave a slight laugh. But this time Violet Fisher came to Bertie's aid. "No," she said, "that's just it—they lead to nothing."

"What good?" said Bertram, with a certain good-natured contempt. "Well, for one thing, I keep myself out of mischief. Isn't that enough? If you can contrive to do no harm in the world, you have done a good deal."

"But there are others who are doing much more than that," said Miss Fisher, "and you think yourself in a position to condemn their theories . . ."

"Oh, I know. 'Doing the great work of humanity,' as your friends Hugo Pemberton or Frederick Manningham would say. Of all the rot that's talked now-a-days that is the greatest—in my humble opinion," Bertram replied.

"Because you condemn yourself to sterility you think everybody else can do nothing. But you've no right to judge for other people. You should ask whether their writings do good to hard working men and women . . ."

Lawes sat still and chuckled, as he saw Miss Fisher's colour come and go.

"Oh, no doubt they have their uses. But from really great people you don't get that sort of balderdash," and Bertram laid his hand on an article of Frederick Manningham's which had just appeared. "What do you suppose another generation will care for Manningham's articles? . . . Of all pictures I have ever read of the great names of the earth," he went on, "I like best that one in Vasari of Donatello and

Filippo Brunelleschi going out to get their supper of eggs and cheese, and the practical joke that Brunelleschi played upon Donatello by bringing him suddenly face to face with the crucifix he had been secretly working upon, so that his friend dropped the supper and all the eggs got smashed. Do you suppose that people like that talked about doing the great work of the world, and such fudge? Who will care for Frederick Manningham and his meditations four hundred years hence? and who can look at Donatello's 'St. George' without a tightening of the heart?"

When the others had gone, Vanlennert was still ruminating on Bertram's way of looking at things. If he would only explain!

"I wish I could be as philosophical as you are," he said, in the same discontented tone as before.

"Well, you can't. It doesn't come at five-and-twenty."

"Do you feel perfectly contented to go on studying those things till the end of your life?"

"That's another of the phrases of five-and-twenty. At my age one leaves off saying such things as 'To the end of your life.' You talk of to-morrow, or possibly the day after."

"Then, I suppose you don't—don't believe in anything," Bertie said, after a moment's pause.

"On the contrary, I believe in a good deal. I'm reckoned a conservative in philosophy."

"But all religions and that sort of thing go in for thinking of the future."

"*All* religions and that sort of thing. You've not studied all religions, I fancy, or you wouldn't talk so glibly. What about the Stoics?"

"Oh! of course, I don't pretend to know. . . . Religion doesn't seem of much use," he added rather irrelevantly, in a gloomy voice.

"It depends what use you want to put it to."

"I suppose you'd say it was a theory, and nothing else?"

"H'm!" was Bertram's enigmatical reply, as he took a pull at his pipe.

"By no use," the other went on, in the same injured tone, "I meant, the more you think about it the less true it seems." Herbert had never made that reflection before; now it arose spontaneously out of his feeling of discontent with all things.

"Speak for yourself."

"Who or what is to speak for itself?" said Bradshaw, who

came in at the moment with Hales, another occasional contributor to the *P. R.*

"Religion, I fancy," said Bertram, placidly.

"Oh, I know," said Bradshaw, "Bertram's got a patent creed of his own. But he's so afraid of its being sat upon that he never lets on what it is."

"I suppose we shall have to wait for the appearance of the *magnum opus*," Hales said.

"Exactly. You can't expect me to spoil my effect," Bertram replied, smiling and pushing a tobacco-jar near the newcomers.

"Well, I call that the most awful avowal of selfishness I ever heard," cried Bradshaw; "don't you?" he added, turning to Vanlennert, who tried to answer, but the words stuck in his throat. "If there's any truth in religion, it must be, according to your own confession, a supremely important thing for us to know it; and if there's not, it's not one whit less important. And yet, in order not to spoil your effect, as you say, you would let us all perish in ignorance if we happen to die before the *annus mirabilis*—what year is it going to come out in?"

"Not a bit," said Bertram. "Because all theological controversy is useless in the present day, by reason that none of the controversialists are honest. They are none of them in search of truth, only of arguments to sustain a position in which they have an interest—as orthodox parsons or priests of humanity or arch-agnostics, it's all the same. Meantime Philosophy pursues her calm way, as Science does alongside of speculators and patentees. Future generations will gain the benefit—when we get honest again . . ."

"Then will be Domesday near," said Bradshaw, "and philosophy and your system won't be of much use."

"I don't know," Bertram replied, coming to a sudden stop, as he often did when interrupted.

Vanlennert went away. His face was pale, so that even the passers-by noticed it. He was stifled in that atmosphere of diettantism. For the first time he brought home to himself the fact that here was a man who was devoting his whole life to these arid disputes over teleology and causality, and the rest. And there were matters of tremendous importance to him about which no one troubled himself. No one trying to find anything for him to do, though all the world about him was busy and occupied with its own concerns. He began to

see that it was his idleness, his want of occupation, which made grief press so heavily upon him. Why had he no fixed work, when all the rest of mankind was busy? And why should he have all these doubts of God and moral law, when everybody else was satisfied? Oh, it was hard! Everyone bent on his own concerns, and no one giving a thought to help him in this way or that out of his misery. He never remembered that six months ago he would have joined in any similar discussion (if he had understood its aim) in as light-hearted a way as any one; because then he was contented with his inherited beliefs, and did not know what it was to have "great searchings of heart."

His instinctive manliness came to his rescue. He had all his life been used to walk alone, and never felt the burden of it till now. Thoughts not formulated told him that he could do so still.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"I SAY, Florrie, my angel," said Alleyne, as he was drawing on his shoes, "I'm going to introduce you to a friend of mine to-morrow night. Be kind to him for my sake."

"Not if 'e's like you I'm sure I shan't," said Miss Armour. She alternated, when speaking with gentlemen, between dropping her aspirates and putting them in with double emphasis.

"I didn't mean he was quite as nice as I am. But he is even more innocent than I've been since—well, you know what some company will do for a saint."

"Precious innocent you are, and have been all the time I've known you," Florrie replied, looking round from where she stood before a mirror.

"Well, but this nice boy is really as innocent as the babe unborn. Though we don't know what the babe unborn may be *thinking* about, do we? (I don't at any rate.) But he really is a very nice boy, and his name is Bertie. Pretty name, isn't it? And it goes very well with yours. Bertie and Florrie, like two little turtle-doves."

"Go along! How silly you are!" said Miss Armour, not half displeased. She was never quite still for a moment, but always bridling, moving her shoulders, stretching her neck, and

contemplating herself in the glass; and as she knew that her profile was her strong point—at any rate in the estimation of this admirer—she scarcely ever looked Alleyne full in the face.

“Now look here, Florrie,” Alleyne said now, dragging her onto his knee. “It’ll be a great joke. Mind you stuff him up a bit. Pretend you never saw anyone before.”

“‘Ow can I pretend that, you silly, if I’m with you?” and as she spoke she turned and gave Alleyne a kiss.

“Oh, well, perhaps we won’t go so far as that. I shall tell him you’re an artist. You must turn up at the Imperial tomorrow . . . by chance. Let me see. . . . How shall we spoof it?”

“Oh, come along with you. We shan’t have time to get a bit of dinner before ‘King Cophetua’ begins.”

Alleyne was very popular with the class of young lady to which Miss Armour belonged, as one who always behaved like a gentleman. That is to say, he was not afraid to take his friends out to little dinners and to the play, to little balls and to little suppers, attentions which they valued above handsome presents from men who seemed to be more than half ashamed to find themselves in such company.

In certain states of the mind a good dinner may stand for a confession of faith, and to Bertie, a day or two after the discussion in Bertram’s chambers, the thought of the dinner he was having with Alleyne presented itself in this light, a protest against the nebulousness of latter-day theology. It was in virtue of resolutions made three nights ago and a determination to cast off morbid brooding, that he accepted Alleyne’s invitation. How simple and straightforward these chaps were! (Ricketts was of the party.) Not particularly clever, certainly; but then he did not go in for being particularly clever himself. At dinner they had discussed not religion but practical jokes played on Harefield’s pups, and practical jokes at Eton—he and Alleyne—and Windsor-fair adventures.

And now as he sat drinking his coffee and smoking his cigarette with a glass of Benedictine to follow, he felt more nearly in a condition of *bien être* than he would have believed or confessed. Not his appetites only but all the practical side of his nature was soothed by these pleasures of sense.

Presently Ricketts proposed that they should go to a music-hall. “Let’s go to the Imperial. We shall get in time to hear Phil Mason. It’s too late for the theatre,” he said.

'I was just going to propose the same thing,' said Alleyne. 'I forgot to tell you before, but I've had a box sent me for the night—from Charlie Campbell,' he said, turning to Bertie; 'do you know him? he was at Eton about our time—Charlie's a ventriloquist he calls himself.'

'No; there were two Campbells at Warrener's. They both stayed for their house. But they're both in the army, I believe. The one I know is a gunner.'

'Ah, Charlie Campbell was at Leftwich's.'

'There's an awfully good sleight-of-hand chap there now,' Alleyne went on to his two guests. 'Beauséant or some such name. Have you seen him?'

'No,' said Ricketts.

'No,' Herbert said. 'In fact, I don't know that I've been to the Imperial more than once in my life. I don't very much . . .'

'Really?' put in Ricketts. 'It's time you went again, isn't it?'

'It's rather a rowdy place, isn't it?'

Rowdy? Oh, no! . . . Of course there are women there.'

Well. That's just what I meant. I don't care for that sort of thing myself.'

But that's the advantage of having a box,' said Alleyne. 'You're out of the way of all that, if you choose. I knew you were a bit of a prude.'

Herbert stiffened.

'Quite right, too!' Ricketts put in in his good-natured way. 'You can keep out of all that it's much the best. I'd do so if I'd got good enough to marry some nice girl, don't you know.' (Ah! There was a pang.) 'They're a rotten lot, they are, taking them all round. Though they're not so badly painted.'

'Not near!' said Alleyne. (He could not allege poverty as an excuse for vice.) 'Human nature's much the same in all cases. I don't believe all that talk about women being—out of the pale of humanity and all that.'

Oh, that's all bally rot,' said Ricketts from the comfort of his easy-chair—he had got out his pipe. 'It's a matter of public opinion, like everything else. And in the end it all comes from it's just looked at as rather a shady profession as I look upon an Old Bailey lawyer.'

'I believe that really is so?' said Vanlennert, incredulously. 'I don't believe it is . . .'

"Oh, yes," put in Alleyne.

"Look at the faces of the women you see in the streets," Herbert went on. "They're awfully brutalized."

"I'm certain it is," Ricketts said. "You only judge by the regular street-walkers, who are the lowest sort. I'm not panning out as an example of virtue. I never do to anyone. But I must honestly say I don't think there's anything particularly degrading—to either side—in—in that sort of *liaison*, you know. . . . However, that's nothing to do with going on to the Imperial to-night," he continued in a good-natured way—for Bertie looked a little disgusted. "I always say one's much best out of it. You're quite right about that."

Herbert would not have chosen this form of amusement. But he decided that it would look ridiculous to refuse.

And yet from the moment they entered the bright glass doors of the Imperial a certain dread fell upon him. He had been once before to the same place. That was on a boat-race night; and all he remembered of it then was of crowds and much shouting and pushing, which from time to time nearly sharpened themselves into blows. Now, the change in the look of the place and the keenness with which he took in all he saw betokened greater changes in him. There was something fateful in the aspect of that broad soft red carpet in the hall and on the wide shallow stairs. Alleyne went to the box-office to change his order. Two men were lounging at the foot of a short flight of steps talking in low tones—a dark fat man in dress clothes, and a tall one in a sort of livery like that of a club porter. Then a party of young men came in in fur-lined overcoats. They took them off and showed that they were in evening dress and had flowers in their button-holes. Next two women passed him, both handsomely dressed and the nearest of the two—who shed a faint odour of wood-violets around her—was, as Bertie was fain to confess to himself, almost distinguished-looking. She gave her left hand to one of the young men. "How are you, Fred?" she said, but scarcely looked at him as she passed up the steps.

"Now, what sort of woman is that?" Herbert thought. "Is it possible that any one who looks so refined can be bought for money like a slave?" And he felt a sudden sickly feeling about the heart. He wished he had not come, but at the same time he could not repress a certain curiosity to see if any other girl here was as taking as this one.

Alleyne had got his tickets now, and they passed on. What

an infernal din! Surely not quite of the upper world, but some sort of pandemonium this flare and glitter of lights, of men and women in morning and evening dress, some of the latter very *décolletées* and with a general sense of cheeks redder and eyes brighter than it was natural for them to be under this gas-light. But it was exciting and intoxicating. The worship of the Paphian goddess, strange to Herbert, was all about him. It had a temple in every brain of all that seething crowd. And into Vanlennert's brain this secret influence, along with the fumes of the wine which he had taken at dinner and which in any other circumstances would have had no effect upon him, began to mount.

"We'll come round presently," said Ricketts, "and have a look at the promenade."

Herbert gave a start and felt guilty. He had certainly been looking eagerly at the people he passed by. Then to remember that the sights and sounds of this strange underworld were familiar things to Alleyne and Ricketts!

They got into their box, and Bertie felt more at his ease again, looking on at a performance as he might do at a theatre, and all the pandemonium world shut off behind. Presently the door opened, and Charles Daventry came in and was introduced to Vanlennert and Ricketts. "Vanlennert was at Truscott's," Alleyne explained.

"Oh, were you at the Mole's?" Charlie said, becoming sensibly more cordial to an old Etonian.

"Come up, won't you, and have a drink?" Alleyne said, and the party left the box.

Bertie was being dragged out of his element and divined it. If he had gone to the Imperial with Alleyne alone the latter would have respected his scruples. Now, with Ricketts and Campbell to bear a share of the responsibility, his host felt he could relax his duties. Besides, the whole evening was in some respects part of the plot which Alleyne and Ricketts had sketched out a month ago; though not so much deliberate design as chance was to be credited with its execution.

They went up to a large promenade crowded with men and women. Some were in evening dress rather *voyant* and not too decent. But a considerable number were dressed well indeed, but simply enough, and had the outward appearance of some refinement. A nearer view and an experienced eye might have detected the superficiality of this; but not Herbert's. He was

too confused and, it must be owned, too excited by all he saw to look far beneath the surface.

In a wide space at the back of the promenade were numberless small tables with marble tops and little groups—always, it seemed to Bertie, containing members of both sexes—at each. Their party was the single exception. A waiter in plush and knee-breeches came up and the drinks were ordered. And presently Herbert's heart gave an unmistakable throb; for to a table close to theirs came the refined-looking girl who had passed him in the hall. She looked five- or six-and-twenty, quite the sort of girl one might meet in any drawing-room, he thought—a pleasant face with crumpled light-brown hair and clear blue-grey eyes. Her complexion appeared to be quite natural.

Charlie Campbell saw the direction Vanlennert's eye had taken.

"Handsome girl, isn't she?" he said in a low voice. "Her name's Kirtle. I don't know her; I wish I did."

"By Jove, so do I," said Ricketts, looking on. "I expect she's new in the profession."

"She may be a kind of artist," said Campbell, "and combine the two businesses. Well, I saw a chap I know speak to her just now. I shall get him to introduce me. That's the advantage of being an artist yourself. If she takes that lay and has come to see the biz with a view to going on herself, she'll be glad to know me. . . . I don't suppose that is it with her all the same," he said, after a minute's observation.

"Oh, no," said Ricketts, "she seems to know a lot of chaps here."

Bertie's cheeks were burning—with indignation in which was no small spark of jealousy. A half-formed romance flitted through his mind—that the girl should be really "all right," only in danger of becoming not so; that he should bring her to a sense of her danger and—"and then—what, then?" said conscience. But the whole idea had been so fleeting and visionary that he saw no need of dealing with conscience.

Alleyne had strolled off before this talk began. After looking about a little he lighted upon Miss Armour.

"Oh, here you are, Florrie," and he went up to shake hands with her. "I say, have you been here long?"

"Only just come up the stairs." She merely laid her hand in Alleyne's as she spoke.

"I say you remember what I said about introducing you to

a friend of mine to-night. He's just round the corner having a drink with . . ."

"Well, you can take and give me a drink, too; though I'm sure I don't remember about your friend."

"Oh, yes, you do . . . Do you mind coming upstairs? I don't want him to see you just yet. I want you to come round and meet us just outside our box—No. 7," said Alleyne, whose whole mind was now concentrated on carrying out his plot against the innocence of his friend. "Look here," he went on in a low tone as they sat together at the table, "you mustn't let him think I wanted to introduce him to you, or that I've seen you before, to-night—I'd better . . ."

"Oh, don't bother me about your friend," said Miss Armour, giving her shoulders a shake. "I should think you'd better take him home and put him to bed. Tuck 'im up and give him a piller. That's the best thing for him!"

But Alleyne knew that this ebullition of impatience meant nothing, and that he might put faith in Miss Armour's instinct of conquest.

Alleyne rejoined his friends. Ricketts went off with Campbell, and only he and Herbert returned to their box. In the corridor they met a lady by herself, who looked hard at Alleyne and held out a pretty little gloved hand.

"Oh, Mr. Alleyne, how do you do?" she said, in an affected voice.

"Oh, how are you, Miss Armour? Have you come to hear Lottie Bird sing the 'Piccadilly Pet'?"

"Yes, that's it. I have a friend as—'oo promised to come with me. But the last moment she was took—taken hill, and I had to come by myself."

"Where are you sitting? I'll come round and have a chat with you presently."

Miss Armour appeared a good deal taken aback by this sentence. But Alleyne, who was half a pace in front of Bertie kept his eyes rivetted on her face, and in a moment she recovered her presence of mind.

"Well, that's just it," she said, embarrassed, "I haven't got a place. The fact is I never was here before. I'm sure I quite trusted to my friend to know. . . ."

"Dear me! that's very awkward. . . . It wouldn't do for you to sit in the circle quite by yourself in a place like this. . . . If you really want a seat—Lottie Bird's coming on directly—there's room in my box. . . ."

"Oh, I'm sure you're most kind, Mr. Alleyne. But I couldn't think of accepting your kindness. . . ." And she looked rather hesitatingly towards Alleyne's companion.

Alleyne had also turned to Bertie. "You won't mind? Miss Armour (she's all right, you know; only here for professional reasons," he said, in a lower tone), "my friend, Mr. Vanlennert—Miss Armour."

Vanlennert bowed, but rather stiffly.

"Go in, do," said Alleyne, as the box-keeper opened the door for them. "There's room for four in this box." Then when she had entered he stopped to explain the situation more fully to his friend.

"I'm awfully sorry if you don't like it. But I didn't see how I could help offering it. I'll tell you all about her afterwards," he whispered, apologetically.

"Well, I think it's almost . . ." Bertie began.

"Oh, stay a minute or two. It's rather hard lines on her—treating her like a leper, you know."

"So it is," thought Bertie, with sudden repentance and a recollection of Annie Gray, whom he had once again been to see since the last recorded visit a month ago.

"You're a chap I can trust not to do the girl any harm," Alleyne whispered, when they were inside. "She's had rather a hard time of it and is beginning to get on. It's deuced hard for an artist to keep straight once she gets talked of or anything of that sort."

Miss Armour had her head turned towards the stage so as just to show the whole of her delicate profile and no more.

"I'm rather glad Ricketts isn't here. In fact, I think I'll just keep him out of the way till after Lottie Bird's song is over." And Alleyne went out of the box, leaving Bertie alone with his friend. A proof, the latter argued, of her entire respectability.

Then Lottie Bird came on, sang two songs in succession, and the next number was put up. Miss Armour for the first time turned and looked about her.

"Well, I'm sure," she said, "I didn't know Mr. Alleyne was going for more than a minute. I ought to be going, now I've heard Miss Bird sing. But I don't like to go away without seeing Mr. Alleyne. He's always been so kind to me, has Mr. Alleyne. And there's not many to be that . . ."

Florrie still kept her profile turned during most of her speech; but she threw now and again sidelong glances at Bertie, and the

glance with which she concluded was longer than the others. Then she cast her eyes down and the corners of her mouth fell likewise.

Bertie felt sympathetic, only Alleyne had not given him the word of explanation that he had promised, and Herbert could not guess what this girl's history or her troubles might be.

"Are you—did you come here specially to hear Lottie Bird?" he said.

"Yes, that was it," and this time Miss Armour looked frankly into his eyes. "You see, sir, I'm in the profession myself. . . . Only just now I'm out of an engagement, worse luck!"

"Ah! That must be a bore. Of course its very precarious. . . ."

"Châncy. I should think it was. And not much profit while the run lasts after you've found your dresses, and that . . . I'm pretty well sick. . . . But then it's the only thing . . . I can do," she added, suddenly changing her tone and heaving a sigh.

"I should have thought you could have got some more regular work in—a—post-office or something like that," said Herbert, avoiding the use of the word "shop," which seemed to have a hint of insult in it.

"Not *I*, sir. Once you're *hin* the profession, you see, sir, they won't look at you. Besides, it's this way with me, you see," Florrie went on, drawing on an imagination which was naturally vivid and had not rusted for want of use. "It's my stepfather that forces me to go on as I am."

"But how do you mean? What an awful shame! Do you act with him, or what?"

("Hush," said someone from the next box, for a monologue was going on on the stage, and Herbert had to lower his voice.)

Miss Armour changed her seat so as to be close to him, and she too spoke low.

"No, it's not much acting *he* does now," she said, in a bitter whisper. More and more clearly the salient features of a story which she had once read in the *London Journal* came back to her mind.

"You mean he takes the money you earn?" said Bertie.

"He'd take all I earn fast enough if I'd let him." Florrie had become less prim in her manner now. "He's took all my poor mother's money, and she working like a slave for him. It's shame-ful, it is . . ."

"Really? Yes, it is disgusting. But . . ."

"I know what he'd like," Miss Armour went on, softly and confidentially; "he'd like me not to be a modest gurl. Then I'd get on quickly enough, I daresay. Those managers they're horrid beasts. You've no idea . . ." And Miss Armour cast on Bertie a glance from moist eyes. "It isn't like as if one had a regular friend," she added, rather enigmatically, and again she looked at him.

"Is Alleyne an old friend of yours? . . ." Bertie began, for the sake of saying something.

"Oh, Mr. Alleyne's very kind. I don't say but that he's helped me a bit. . . . But he's not much to look at, is he?" Florrie added, turning once more the battery of her glance on her neighbour.

Bertie did not speak. He was conscious of a tightness about his heart, but at the same time of a rising suspicion of the girl near whom he was sitting. Miss Armour may have seen something of this. Anyway, she was tired of this comedy.

"Well, I'm not going to wait any more," she said, in a new voice, full of impatience and disgust. But as a second thought she took a card from her card-case. "Will you give Mr. Alleyne this? I've changed my address," she said. "I suppose you think yourself too good to come and see me," she added, with a slight touch of *dépit*.

"Oh, no! I shall be very glad," said Bertie, in a merely conventional tone.

"Then you can keep a card for yourself," and she gave him another.

Alleyne came back almost directly Miss Armour had gone. "I'm afraid I've been rather long," he said. "By Jove, Miss Armour's gone!" He gave a scrutinising glance at Bertie, whose cheek was flushed and his eyes bright. Long! It seemed to him that he had passed through an eternity; that he was a different being from that he had been before Miss Armour had come into their box.

And that night he tossed sleepless on his bed. What horrible depths of villainy that girl's talk had opened out before him. And the other—the refined-looking girl he had seen on the stairs and in the drinking-saloon—probably she had as tragic a history; some man who pushed her to her ruin for the sake of the gains. And those beasts like Charlie Campbell, who took advantage of a girl's necessities and unprotected condition. And then the memory of Miss Armour's glances shot through

n. If a girl did do wrong, what a difference there was between going wrong with some one she really cared for and doing only for money! How odd it was that this girl should have seemed to have suddenly fallen in love with him, Bertie, who had never flattered himself that he had many attractions for the other sex! Yet the way she looked must mean that. He might be the means of keeping her straight if he did just call. If that other one had looked at him like that, he could not have resisted her. "How lucky it was *not* her!" he said to himself, rather ruefully.

Should he go and see this Miss Armour? But how queer it would be having two girl acquaintances in a lower rank! Nobody outside would believe that the acquaintance was mere friendship.

Thereat he thought again of Annie Gray, and that last time she had looked at him—now he came to think of it—something as this girl had looked. Yes. Her he really must call, just once more, at any rate. He had only been twice, and she looked so very pleased when she saw him again and so very disappointed when he went away. She *had* claims upon him.

And after this feverish tossing night, he did go and see his little friend in Baldwin Street, feeling strangely confused in his head and as if the whole world had spun into new moral regions since its last revolution.

Perhaps his hostess discerned a change in him likewise. For after she had shown him into the back sitting-room, she left him for five minutes, and when she came back she said, "I think there's old Tucker's got a friend coming in in a minute. I wouldn't like him to see you again, sir, after the shameful way he behaved—though he was sorry enough afterwards for what he done. But you won't mind coming into my room, will you? It's all tidy, for I've got no work doing just now."

And as she was speaking Herbert noticed with a new sort of thrill that her appearance was different from what it was the last time he saw her. There was more colour in her cheeks, more glossiness in her hair, which was prettily puffed out above her forehead. In especial her eyes looked much brighter than of wont, with a very, very faint pencilling above and below.

And—and—it was Annie Gray who profited by all the sidious attacks which had been made upon Herbert Vanlen-

nert's virtue, in which she had consciously borne the smallest part.

"What did you *mean* by saying that you were a dress-maker?"

"Well, I was before my misfortune," Annie Gray had answered. "Mrs. Joyce gives me a job now and then as it is. You're glad to earn a little bit that way too when you're out of luck. They ain't all such nice fellers as you are. I say, though, dear, I've 'ad a hawful run of bad luck lately. I was obliged to pawn that little thing you gave me, you remember. I wouldn't never 'ave done it, only I owe Mother Tucker a month and she was that narsty. You'll give me something extra just to take it out again, won't you? It's only in for fifteen bo—shillings."

And she added later on, reflectively—

"You like to seem respectable to a stranger somehow, don't you? And you looked that innercent. But I saw you didn't think I wasn't only a dressmaker all the same—not the next time you come anyway."

That was true. Bertie realised it now. Would he have ever thought of going into the work-room of the nearest mantle-maker and expect to find a companion in the first pale-faced, pale-haired girl whom he saw there? No. He had been deceiving himself all along. And now! What a degraded wretch he was!

Just to conceive for a moment that this companionship, this association, had presented itself as a means of filling to some extent the blank which the loss of Silvia had left in his existence! Silvia! The type of pure womanhood. How the image of her came back upon him now!—The soft touch of her fingers, the pure poise of her head, the maidenly look in her eyes. And he—he was sunk past all redemption. It was profanity to think of Silvia now.

These were Bertie's thoughts the next afternoon, as he sat alone on a bench in Kensington Gardens, his face bowed towards the earth. There was a sodden mass of foliage before his eyes. The remnants of gladioli which had shed their last bloom, a plant of Michaelmas daisy on which one discoloured flower still stayed. Everything was slipping away.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"I HOPE you have been really praying to Jesus to keep you out of temptation and to turn your sinful heart to him," Mrs. Maynard said gravely and sorrowfully to Kitty as she came to see her in bed.

She did this every night to all her children, and spoke to them faithfully (to use the phraseology of her sect—which indeed is appropriate enough if it be given its etymological meaning—concerning their faith or from the depths of her own). She did not use stereotyped phrases, not, that is to say, what seemed to her to be such, nor say the same things to each child: and therefore to Kitty the unconverted she spoke quite differently from the way she addressed Lily, who slept in the same room.

"Suppose it is God's pleasure to take you to-night, Kitty, are you prepared to go?" she added, gravely.

To Lily she said, "Have you placed yourself in the arms of Jesus, Lily, to-night?"

"Yes, mother," said the other without hesitation.

Kitty thought that if it pleased God to take her this night it would put an end to her misery. For, at this moment she felt very miserable, in great tribulation and in a most terrible dilemma. She had at any rate prayed after her fashion.

"He never comes to see me now," Kitty had said to herself on her knees. "Oh, what am I to do? Oh, Jesus, don't punish me any more, and I will believe in you whatever Laura says! Only I must go to her sometimes, or I shall never meet him at all."

It was a fearful dilemma. Last year it had been all delight and the pleasure of this world and trust in Laura (Mrs. Ayn-tree) to get her everything she most desired. Now Jesus had found her out.

The household ways of the Maynards had very much changed this spring—it was May now. Her father rarely took her out. He seemed absorbed in his own work or his own thoughts. He did not encourage her now to come to the studio. And what was worse than all, she had scarcely seen her hero since last summer. This was a clear judgment of the heavenly powers on her association with Atheists. She dreaded to sharpen their

vengeance: but she dreaded still more to shut almost the one remaining door against the chance of seeing "Bertie."

The door threatened to shut itself. For Kitty had lost a good deal of her brightness of last year. Above all, her face depicted such a terror of the profanities which Mrs. Ayntree was fond of scattering freely about her (they were her chief source of wit) that she became quite annoying. "To think she should be sinking back into fetichism after all!" thought the elder lady. "I suppose superstition is in their blood like struma, and nothing will drive it out."

In the distress of her feelings and her fears Kitty was forming a sort of private religion of her own. Her Jesus was quite a different being from her mother's God. And she had leanings towards the worship of the Virgin and certain saints, especially of Magdalen.

The truth is she had lighted upon an old volume of Crasshaw's poems which had been stuffed away in a corner of the studio; and their half-amatory, half-religious character fitted her mood to a nicety.

"Thawing crystals, snowy hills,
Still speeding, never spent, I mean
Thy sweet eyes, fair Magdalene,"

she used to repeat to herself with delicious emotion—with a double feeling, sometimes picturing the ideal lover saying these words to her.

Or again—

"Come, brave soldiers, come and see
Mighty Love's artillery.
This was the conquering dart, and lo!
There shines the quiver, there the bow.
These the passive weapons are
That made great Love a man of warre."

Religious poetry such as this presented religion in quite a new and in a much more attractive light than of old.

"Mercy on me! What is to become of me? What is to be come of me?"

It was Bertie Vanlennert who made this reflection, who raised this cry to Heaven. He was once again in the Park. But now it was early summer. He was passing across the open grassy space which lies on the north side of Hyde Park. In

ck-coat and tall hat, carrying his umbrella by the middle as walked, he looked as unlike a despairing sinner as any one old well do.

It was a dull day. A chilly not strong wind blew from the north. Squadron after squadron of grey cloud, dark troops of plumes with only lighter grey toxotæ between, marched across the sky. But it was in the full London season, and, as a counterpart upon earth, there passed along the drive an endless succession of carriages whose roar, where Herbert was standing, came dully on the ear. "What is to become of me?" Overcome by the strength of his feelings, being quite alone where he was, he let himself subside, tall hat and umbrella and all, on the parched grass. He looked up at the clouds, the endless waves, the constant procession. The dull eternal roar seemed to be all round and within him.

Any one among his friends who could have heard his thoughts would have been amazed. For to the world at large Vanlennert seemed rather exceptionally lucky just now.

Most people agreed that he was much improved. It was six months since the event recorded in the last chapter, and during this time the young squire of Netley had matured wonderfully. Formerly he scarcely seemed his age, now in character he was like a man of six-and-twenty at least. Outward things had gone fairly well with him. He had acquired a facility in his journalistic work which, could he have foreseen it, would have surprised and delighted him beyond measure eighteen months ago. This was now his chief means of livelihood. He had, however, been called to the bar in the previous autumn. Immediately he received two briefs—that was through the old firm of family solicitors at Burton Broadway. They were only consent briefs, that is true. But there is a better and worse way of merely consenting, and "old Dodge," who was retained in the same cause, argued well of his pupil's appearance and manner. Captain Banbury and Wheatley had been able to get a little more work in his way since then: though it must be owned this initial success at the bar seemed now to have come to a pause. Such, however, was the universal experience. When the Tythe Vale property had been sold—rather better than had been expected. The loss of it did not weigh upon him, and he was perfectly independent of his uncle's help now as indeed a man of his age was bound to be.

This was the outward look of things. The inward look was otherwise.

A week after Bertie had paid his visit to the Imperial last November, Alleyne, who had received this message from Miss Armour, but did not know what had been the final upshot of his manœuvres, told Bertie that she had been enquiring why he did not go to see her as he had promised.

This seemed convincing proof to Herbert that so far as his friend knew she was "all right." But then he remembered the looks she had given him. Experience had lent them a new force, had sharpened their attraction and blunted his sensibilities. He was not bound to Annie in any way should it prove that. . . So he went.

And in this manner Herbert was embarked upon a course which his father had travelled before him. Even Harry Vanlennert had not been precisely vicious by nature. What becomes a vice in the event may have many roots, among them a mere natural softness and sensibility to woman's charms, and a persuasion that everybody else treated them worse than he did; and that in his society at any rate they would not be degraded and brutalized.

These were the roots of feeling in Bertie's mind, and in that same way his father had begun a career that ended tragically enough for the victims of many of his amours.

There was one person for whom Herbert Vanlennert had not improved, and that was Molly. Her innocent mind could not guess the reason of the change; but she saw the extent of it as no one else did. Herbert acknowledged to himself that he did not care to go to Gretton now. But his explanation of this was easy. Silvia had destroyed all that for him. Now at this moment as he sat on the grass in Hyde Park arose in his mind all of a sudden the vision of a particular steep path down through the Netley wood, a path in which the roots held up the earth so as to form a succession of steps. The intense pleasure it used to be to him as a child to walk down these steps! so that an after-glow of that delight lingered quite on to mature years. It seemed to him that if he could once recover that feeling he would be saved. But he could not even in fancy. No: it was not only on account of Silvia.

A month since his life entered on a new phase. Alleyne had said to him once—he and Alleyne were much thicker than they used to be—

"I say, will you come to a ball at Rose Dawson's next Thursday? I've promised Charlie Campbell to go. One sees some stunning girls there, sometimes more or less on the q. t., and

ith luck, you know, you may tumble on a good thing, as they themselves would express it—in private."

Herbert in his secret soul attributed the origin of all his sins to Charlie Campbell, whom he cordially disliked. But there were certain associations with his name which were painfully delicious. He could not refuse.

And the event justified the painfully delicious thrills which he had felt as he dressed himself with immense care and put an exotic in his button-hole. His eyes darted through the throng of well-grown handsome girls in many costumes till they lighted upon one figure in a Greek dress entrancingly smart about the skirts and coquettish as to the lop-sided cap, which enclosed the figure and shaded the refined face of Miss Kirtle.

When he was introduced to her he found himself blushing and stammering almost as he had done (oh, shameful recollection!) in the early days of his acquaintance with Silvia. This was something very different from his condescending relations with Annie Gray or Florrie Armour. Those were passing pleasures; this was a passion.

It had only lasted a month, yet already Vanlennert's pecuniary gains were in danger of being compromised. He knew that he was ready to spend any money if he could buy this girl for himself: he knew that the thought of her troubled all his other thoughts and interfered with his work. Yet even this passion was not wholly base. He felt about Beatrice Kirtle what he had felt the first day he saw her, that it was intolerable that all that appearance of innocence and charm should be corrupted by men like Campbell or sold in the market to the highest bidder. And at times Beatrice Kirtle herself felt the same. Then she would become pathetically confidential with Bertie, vow that she would throw over the good-natured and not jealous old gentleman who was her present protector and have no other lover but him. Would he marry her if she broke with everybody else? she asked sometimes; and often enough Bertie seriously thought that he could.

But the slightest temptation, a new trinket, a new excitement, put all Bee's good resolutions to flight. And there were moments when her lover revolted against the essential corruption which he discerned behind her beauty and charm and which was spreading from her to him.

It was one of those moments now. If he could ever again

take delight in that steep path and its natural steps and in their mossy fern-shaded borders he would be saved. But it was impossible; never again!

Now for the first time he looked round the world and realised how much alone in it he was. No such sensations had ever come upon him in old days. Strange that it should not have done so. All his boyhood began unbidden to unroll itself before Bertie's eyes as he sat there on the grass. He had not been born at home—at Netley that is. He had been brought there by his father. His arrival at his grandfather's house was almost the first among childish reminiscences which stood out clearly in his mind: though dimly at the back of that, very far away as of some pre-natal life, there came half remembrances of his mother in bed, of an old lady or old woman he had lived with in a house—there were two or three scenes in which she appeared—then of his father and the journey they had made together and the old woman too. . . . It was all very uncertain and shifting.

His grandfather—surely, Bertie thought to himself, he was more reserved than most old gentlemen are. There was a curious aloofness about him—though he was affectionate too in his way.

It was the uselessness of his life which made him think of all these things: yes, that was it. What was this pretence of practising at the bar? or his journalism either, for that matter—earning a pound or two here and a pound or two there? And frittering away his life all the time: his life which he could never recapture. “By Jove! I never saw it all before. What am I? Not the owner of Netley, because I get nothing from it. Not a professional man, because I'm always expecting to settle down there some day—expecting, expecting; why, in the name of Lucifer? When, when—I had hopes of Silvia there might be some excuse for waiting, eternally waiting on fortune. Is there any devil on this mortal earth condemned to a more miserable and contemptible existence than mine? With no hope either: all my hopes in life died at Silvia's marriage. How curious that I should have met her again the other day and not gone home and cut my throat afterwards! That's the worst sign of all, the most contemptible part of me. I can take the pleasures which come from day to day and yet go on with no hopes, no future, nothing, nothing.” Thus he spoke within himself.

Well, there was nothing got by thinking over these things.

Herbert picked himself up. But he felt it impossible to fulfil his engagement he had been on his way to keep, impossible to run near the crowd of carriages and recognise acquaintances there. London was full of acquaintances for him now and no friend—no friend.

So he made his way out on the Oxford Street side. Presently he passed a large book-shop and turned to look at the books in the window. And as he stood there a fresh wave of trouble passed over him. What delight he had had in reading while he was at Cambridge! Had not that too gone, gone lost altogether? Was that his fault—or whose? He remembered how a boundless curiosity possessed him in those days, the thought not clearly formulated of the vast immeasurable tracts of knowledge which lay waiting for the explorer, a virgin forest for him in which he might wander for ever without fear of coming to the end.

But this time a cold hand was laid upon him. The first thing that caught his eye was a row of novels in various bindings—endless new ones—then another row in outward appearance all precisely similar. But novels had never been in his taste. There was a third series of books more to his taste—books on science—then again a series of biographies. But, alas! what were these things that represented the fields of knowledge which he once hoped to explore? He knew many of these books. There was *Chemistry* by one great pundit, *Physics* by another, *Physiology* by a third. And in another row was a life of Goldsmith covering say one hundred and fifty pages, a life of Burke almost exactly equal in length, another of Chatham in a different series. "This," said Black Despair, "is the virgin forest you once dreamt of wandering through. You remember some glimpses you once got into the history of England in the eighteenth century, first in some popular abridged history, next by chance readings in Horace Walpole, Burke himself, and in chapters of Carlyle's *Frederick*? What you make out of these eligible building sites into which this explored land, into which the whole field of possible reading you have been, is being, divided?"

And so distressed was Herbert's mood already that this vision seemed to come like the breath of a scorching wind over his whole life. It chimed in in a strange way with his sense that in making multitudinous acquaintances in London he had got no friend, that in abandoning the life of the country he had left all reality behind him, and got into a region of

phantasmal beings, "bundles of clothes," as Carlyle says somewhere, "grimacing in a quite hideous manner." Was not friendship as hollow a thing as knowledge?

All was tainted then: his active life, his intellectual, his moral. Was it his fault or the fault of the world? Was he cankered by his vices? What did it all mean?

Then as people catch at any relief, Bertie saw an omnibus pass him which he knew went to Temple Bar. He would go to Anderton's, where there was a tolerable chance of meeting Bertram at dinner. There were, he thought upon reflection, only two people who in the way of friendship stood out at all from the rest—Bertram was one, Lady More was the other.

It was with a feeling not removed from terror that Herbert Vanlennert made his way into Anderton's old-fashioned dining-room. "If I don't get a word of help from somebody I don't know what I shall do," he said to himself. All the loneliness of his life was concentrated in this one moment.

At first his heart died within him—for no Bertram was there. But in the course of ten minutes the philosopher came to the door. "Hollo!" he said, "Vanlennert, I didn't know you ever dined here." They took a table together, and despair seemed to Herbert to retreat into the vague background.

By the end of dinner it had retreated too far. Herbert could not call back all the feelings which had urged him to look up his elder friend. What was he to ask him? what to talk about? Nothing remained but a distinct sense of comfort in Bertram's neighbourhood and a vague dread of the time when he should be left alone.

And in the end it was Bertram who turned the conversation upon the other's private affairs.

"You spend most of your time in London now, don't you?" he said. "Do your tenants and that sort of thing pay any better than they used?"

"Not much. Yes: I spend most of my time in London." Vanlennert answered. "There's nothing particular for me to do down there." Yet this reply made him feel ashamed, as a person feels who is speaking lightly of an old friendship.

"Of course, if you go in for the bar you're bound to stick to London, and for your journalism too, I should say."

"Yes," the other answered rather absently.

Suddenly he felt he could bear it no longer. He got up and walked impatiently across the room and back, then stood by

the mantelpiece facing Bertram, who continued to smoke on unmoved.

"I wish to the *devil* I could find something sensible to do," he said.

"Sensible?"—Bertram was beginning, but the other went on without listening—

"I've tried one thing and another, and it all seems like acting somehow. There doesn't seem to be any good I can do anywhere."

"That's rum. I always thought that there were a lot of useful things a country squire could do. . . ."

"I don't see what there is. . . . All the actual business I'm free to do—you have to leave everything to your agent nearly. . . ."

"I don't see why, I must say."

"You don't—you wouldn't understand how much till you've tried. I *have* tried to get things more into my own hands, and have done partly. But unless one lived down there. . . ."

"Well, but why not?"

"Why not? Where should I live? And what am I to do? It isn't as if I'd got the place, and all that. That's let."

"Ah, yes, of course."

"And the tenants and all the rest get on just as well when I'm not down there as when I am, and, as I was going to say, the actual business part you can get through in a few weeks."

"I see. Yes. . . ." Bertram spoke reflectively. "You're, in a kind of way, two people—not quite a squire and not quite a journalist or barrister."

"I'm working as hard as I can," Bertie put in in a discontented voice. But the other continued his reflections as if he had not heard.

"The one great guide in life," he said, rather sententiously, "is what you may call reality. Whether what you are doing seems to you a real occupation for a human being or not."

"But I don't see why it shouldn't to me; I do the same sort of things that other people do," Bertie answered, changing round. He knew, however, by experience that the other never took any notice of pettish remarks of that kind, so he went on, in a different tone, "Yes; you're right. I don't know how it is; it doesn't, as you say, seem genuine to me, somehow. I suppose if I could settle down at Netley I should get used to it, but I can't do that. I've had no briefs lately. And then the writing I do—I shall never do it decently. . . ."

"On the contrary," said Bertram, "you've done the stuff you had to do rather curiously well for such an outsider as you are. . . ."

"Stuff!—It is stuff."

"Ah! That's just it. If it seems all bosh to you."

"Still," said the other again, with a touch of resentment, "it seems more real to me than metaphysics or anything like that."

"I dare say it does. I wasn't going to advise you to take up metaphysics or anything like that."

Bertie was not too conceited not to take the snub. "Yes," he went on, in a more humble tone, "I don't know anything about it, of course, and can't judge in the least. But I don't quite understand what you mean by things being real to you or not. Lots of people do nothing else but journalism."

"I should think they do. Bradshaw thinks it the finest occupation in the world. And I remember him when he used to read Greek plays to himself when we were boating down at Plymouth. Now I dare say he thinks in his heart that a column of the *Piccadilly* is worth all the books of Thucydides. It all depends upon the point of view."

"But could not one get the right point of view?" said Herbert, who did not himself care greatly for the eight books of Thucydides.

"I should think that if you'd been brought up to journalism as a profession and taken to it, you might very likely have thought just the same—or the bar, which is very much on the same level. But, you see, being a young swell of a sort, and having been brought up with the conviction that the world was in a fashion at your feet, it seems all stuff to you."

"Oh, I've had a lot of that knocked out of me the last year and a half."

"All the same, you'll never cotton to journalism as a profession, and if you take my advice, you'll try something else."

Herbert looked into the grate, gave a vicious kick to a piece of wood which stood out below the black coals. "No!" he said, without turning round, "I can't make it out. I seem placed differently from anybody else. I get so sick of the life I lead sometimes I feel like enlisting, or something of that sort." Here the recollection of Beatrice Kirtle came upon him with a swoop. He hated the chain; he could not break it. He was fettered on every hand. "What can I try? What

"I find?" he said, with almost a cry, turning his back to the chimney-piece and facing Bertram.

Bertram looked at his young friend critically till Vanlennert, who was not shy as a rule, began to feel slightly out of countenance. "Something—h'm—more or less active and practical, and—h'm—more or less intellectual too. Well, to tell you the truth, you're not a very easy person to fit. . . . But—*attend*—if you were not to give up journalism, how could it be to go out as a foreign correspondent?—a war correspondent would really do you, if the Egyptian war was going on still. Still, that would involve giving up the bar. And I suppose really you could not be spared from down there altogether."

"I don't see what else I can do," said Bertie, gloomily.

"I'm not sure that I do at the moment," said the other. "Besides that, I don't know all your affairs."

There was a few minutes' pause, and then Bertie spoke again, but always in the same discontented voice.

"After all, I don't see why journalism now-a-days shouldn't be just an ordinary profession, as much as lawyering and doctoring."

"Doctoring's a good deal more than a profession with the best sort of doctors—if by profession you mean a means of livelihood."

"I suppose really the best thing one could be would be an artist, or something like that."

"Yes, I dare say it would," Bertram answered, reflectively. "Yes. . . . It's a great thing to be a genuine artist I've no doubt. One hears a lot of rot talked now-a-days about everything being religious—a religious search after truth, and that sort of thing. But there is no doubt that to a man like—like our friend Maynard, though he probably has no idea of it himself, art is a sort of religion. In a sort of way, it puts a man in partnership with the Creator. Only I know that Maynard has doubts about the reality of art itself; whether it can be created by forethought or does not come better of itself—by chance. I can imagine it must be the devil to feel like that."

Bertram was following the bent of his own thoughts, and the other had not caught up the last idea. But presently Vanlennert said—this time in an enquiring tone—

"Haven't you any doubts about the reality of metaphysics?"

"No, not the least," Bertram replied, cheerfully. . . . And

presently, after a pause, "No, that's not at all my view of the matter. I take it that next after the simple and instinctive pursuits that man has practised since the beginning of things—procreation, self-defence, agriculture and its belongings—there are very few of his occupations which more help the world to go on—*qui font le monde à la ronde*—than philosophy. That is to say, that as soon as man ceases to be merely a feeding and procreating animal he becomes a thinking one likewise. From age to age, I believe, men have formed their lives largely upon the thinking which is done for them by the philosophers—or metaphysicians, if you like the word. We occupy the pensive citadels of thought, while the city sleeps peacefully upon the formulas which past generations of metaphysicians have made for it. . . . And if we get paid nothing for the business," and as Bertram went on in what was more a soliloquy than a discourse his voice took that finer inflection, a tone of gentleness and patience which his friends heard only now and again . . . "we are no worse off than those guardians whom Plato designed for his ideal city. . . . I dare say you remember the passage," he said, taking account of Vanlennert's presence.

"No, I don't," said Bertie.

"It has always been an especial favourite with me—I mean where Glaucon or somebody makes to Socrates the objection that he had devised a body of men who are to be called the watchmen or guardians—*φύλακες*, you know—of the city, who are to have all the labour of keeping the others safe, and therefore to be really on that account the most important of the citizens, and yet are to be kept constantly at drill and to have no amusements or pleasures. And to that Plato—Socrates—answers that his object when he was constructing a state was not to make any one class pre-eminently happy, but to make the whole state as happy as it can be made. And he goes on—that is the especial passage I was thinking of—to compare the constructing of a body politic to the making of a statue of a human person—or something to that effect. If you were to complain of the maker of the image that he had not put the most beautiful colours on the most beautiful parts of the body, hadn't made the eyes carmine, for instance (*ὀσπρεῖον*, you know), instead of black, he would answer that it was not his object to make the eyes so beautiful that they didn't look like eyes, and so on, but to make the whole beautiful by giving to each member or feature what was suitable

to it. That's the gist of what he says. . . . Howsomdever," Bertram continued, rousing himself, and knocking out his pipe, "that's no reason why one shouldn't enjoy what one has got. Help yourself to some whiskey and fill your pipe," and he pushed the jar towards Bertie.

"I see," said the latter, in surprise. "I thought that—that—all that sort of thing was only a sort of amusement, like experimenting—only much more so. . . ."

"Well, I was going to say . . ." Bertram began.

"Of course experimenting is for the discovery of laws which may be of use. But metaphysics—I always thought—went on eternally with the same questions."

Bertram gave a little laugh and said nothing. And a sudden wave of depression came over Herbert to think how little life might have to offer to himself—to any one. Here was a man certainly far above the average in gifts, still farther above the average in strength of character—Bertie discovered so much. But what had life brought to such a man? The mere fact that he could sit still and seem content only made this negative show out the stronger. Everybody thought highly of Bertram. They asked his opinion, and then passed it by, treating him as a sort of lumber-room in their existence. For all that the elder man had said, Herbert could not believe that there was the slightest interest for the world in solving the problems which he had sometimes heard Bertram discussing with his more cultivated friends—whether a chair could be not a chair, but only a bundle of sensations: whether there was anything added to this bundle by the mind itself, if that idea was mere sequence. What was mere sequence? Did it involve the idea of cause? What was will? Could it be unconscious? He had sometimes while the talk was going on got a momentary vague inkling of the point in discussion, but had lost it again in an hour or so. Yet he was as clever as the average. Was not this then rot, a mere sad delusion, that idea of Bertram's that he and such as he stood upon some watch-tower of thought?

Yet as Herbert came to this point in his reflection he lifted his eyes and glanced at the solid face opposite him; then he began to doubt his own judgment.

Some shadow of these thoughts must have been conveyed to the mind of Herbert's companion, for, taking a long pull at his pipe, he said presently—

"Yes. . . . You may depend upon it that's about the secret

of the matter—to get hold of some work about the usefulness of which *you* feel thoroughly persuaded, no matter what the others think. People's ideas of comradeship in the present day is a company of people who all think exactly alike. So that you find those miserable little coteries of people bound together because they are all agnostics, all radicals, all High Church, or what not. Their characters may be utterly unsympathetic, but they stick together, because they have to do their thinking in common, and pool their ideas as syndicates of speculators do their money. Now, the truth is, that no idea which you share absolutely with another person is a complete idea to both. . . . The moral of which is," he said, with his good-natured smile, "that I don't, as I said before, the least bit advise you to go in for metaphysics or speculative philosophy."

"Oh, I'm not clever enough," Herbert said.

"Clever enough has nothing to do with it. One man is made for one thing and one for another. I suppose, if you spoke the truth, you'd say 'I'm not fool enough.' . . . Now, I'm going to turn you out if you won't mind. I always begin work at ten."

"By Jove, and I ought to go; I meant to go somewhere to-night."

"That's true," said Bertie to himself, as he made his way homeward on an omnibus, "one's meant to stand upon one's own legs." And he felt more comforted by Bertram's last sentence than by all the previous talk.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"CAN'T you go to a race without betting?"

"I suppose I could," replied Herbert Vanlennert. "As a matter of fact, I generally have something on, and generally lose it. I wish I'd met you before, that's all."

"Oh, I can tell you something more," said young Mrs. Gainsford Cole, moving on to the inner drawing-room. It was at Lady Wendover's.

"Ah, how do you do?" Herbert said to Maynard, whom he passed in the doorway. The painter looked very strange and pale. He only gazed for a minute at Vanlennert with an ex-

pression of infinite sadness, and then looked away toward a group in one corner of the room.

"He does behave rumly," Herbert said to himself.

"Yes," said Mrs. Cole when they were in a corner. "This is a secret. But I'll tell you, because I like you——"

"Not half so much as I like you."

"Johnny Green beat Tel-el-Kebir in a trial yesterday. Nobody knows it scarcely."

"You don't say so!" Herbert said out loud; and then to himself, "He is screwed," the recollection of the meeting with Maynard about a year ago in Churton's studio recurring to him. "He is screwed; no doubt of it; I wonder I never thought of it before. By *Jove*. . . ." And this time Herbert looked more narrowly at the celebrated painter, who was standing still in the same attitude, leaning, with arms crossed, against the door-post of the inner drawing-room. His eyes were constantly fixed upon the two persons on a sociable.

"How dreadfully wicked! It sounds quite frightful and incredible," Vanlennert heard the lady say. No doubt they were discussing a bomb outrage which was to come on for trial in a few days. But though she said the expected things, this lady (whom Herbert would have been inclined to call middle-aged) was rather *distracte* and kept plucking at her fan.

Mrs. Gainsford Cole went on with her stable confidences. The first guess at Maynard's real state had made Vanlennert turn his eyes suddenly back to him. His companion's glance followed his. Then one or two other people in the room looked too. One lady close by gave a very low laugh and whispered something to her neighbour. For at this moment Mr. Keyworthy had quitted Lady Aldenborough's side, and Maynard had walked up solemnly and taken the place he left.

"How do you do?" said Lady Aldenborough, cordially but nervously. "How is it we haven't seen you for such a long time?"

But Maynard only looked into her face and smiled sadly.

"I suppose you've been working very hard," the other went on, rapidly. "You know how much I admire your 'In a Sou'-west Gale;' I told you the day you dined with us, didn't I? I think it is just splendid." Still Maynard did not speak, and Lady Aldenborough went on more rapidly and more nervously than ever. "B—but you ought to take a rest, now the exhibitions are all open. You must not work too hard, you know." There was a kind of ghastly playfulness in the way this was

said. In reality, Lady Aldenborough was getting alarmed by Maynard's continued gaze. Were people looking at them? She did not venture to glance round to see.

"When was that?" Maynard put in when his companion came to a dead pause.

"When was what?" She looked up, surprised, and looked down again at once.

"That I dined with you."

"When *was* it? Oh, yes, I know. It was the day of the private view; don't you remember?"

Maynard gave a grim little laugh. "I didn't say, 'When was that?' because I needed to be told. And when is it now?"

"My dear Mr. Maynard! You are not a board-school master, and I am not a board-school girl." Lady Aldenborough thought it was time to be a little severe.

"It's the middle of May now," Maynard went on, more solemnly than ever, completely ignoring the last remark; "the sixteenth of May, and that was on the first of May. That was the last time I saw you. Do you think it is possible for me to go on living on these terms?"

"Mr. Maynard!" But directly she had spoken these words Lady Aldenborough saw the ridicule of taking him too seriously. "Oh, I think you will get on all right," she said. "I'm the sufferer. I've missed you dreadfully, and our delightful talks when you were painting. I wanted you so much the other day, too, to go with my sister and me to the Beck-with sale. You know there was . . . But, dear me!" she exclaimed, in pretended alarm, "I had quite forgotten that I promised to meet Sir John somewhere else. I must positively go this very minute. You'll come and see me on Wednesday next, won't you?" And she held out her hand.

Maynard got up too, and held the hand in his: he was about to carry it to his lips. "No, no," said Lady Aldenborough, withdrawing it hastily. She too was rather pale—was it fear of a scene, or emotion at the look in Maynard's eyes?

"How horrible! what ought I to do? He will be making everybody talk about us if he goes on like that. . . . I didn't know . . . I hadn't the least idea . . . It looks almost as if it had affected his reason. How terribly impressionable he must be! A man of genius! They're not like other men," Lady Aldenborough said this to herself as she went downstairs. The immediate cause of Maynard's strangeness she never suspected.

That night she lay awake deep into the night-watches. How shocking to think that she—an old woman as she sometimes called herself now—should have—well, yes—actually turned Mr. Harry Maynard's head—she might call him Harry Maynard to herself. Suppose—suppose she had not left Thurstanton Rectory to marry Sir John, and that *he* had happened to come there on a sketching . . . Ah! But he was married! How dreadful, how wrong it all was! But it was not her fault; that was one comfort. Then she lay and listened to Sir John's snore. She had never noticed before how unnerving that snore was.

Suppose Harry Maynard were really to get them talked about, and that John were to be really jealous and made a fuss? Why, then, that would be pushing them into each other's arms. After all—a quite new, an utterly Bohemian life with an artist—wandering over the face of the globe. . . .

Lady Aldenborough had never made it part of her business to have any very strict moral code. She kept an open mind about this as about most things, though her own life had been the most innocent possible. She had hardly gone beyond the precincts, and never beyond the influence of Thurstanton Rectory, until the day that she had been taken to Switzerland by her great-aunt and godmother Lady Georgina Coore.

It was then that she had met Mr. Aldenborough, a rich man who sat still socially on his promotion, while on Georgie Runcorne rested the shadow—say rather fell some of the sunshine—which emanated from her Aunt Georgina—"sister of the late and aunt of the present Duke of Flamborough"—as she was described in the Peerage and in works of the same kind. The match was made by Aunt Georgina.

Wherefore now the middle-aged Lady Aldenborough thought with a curious and awful throb of wonder and speculation over some of the "dreadful" stories which in her quality of a woman of the world had come to her knowledge. Of course she knew at the back of her thoughts that she had got quite beyond taking any such plunge as that. But just as a day dream—or when at night John kept one awake by that terrible snore of his.

Bertie had not heard the dialogue which had gone on between Maynard and Lady Aldenborough. But when he could he cast furtive glances towards the former, and his thoughts were busy about him. "Imagine it! He must be pretty bad if he comes screwed to a party like this—or gets

screwed. I suppose he dined here. A clever chap like that! What will become of him? How frightful for poor Kitty!"

Poor Kitty, indeed! Bertie had not been to see her for months and she was pining in his neglect. He did not know this. But he knew that his presence gave her a very evident pleasure; and on his side he felt differently towards Kitty than he did towards any other child that he knew, or than he felt towards the girls he met in ordinary society. It was for that very reason that he had avoided her, through an instinctive shrinking from touching now her innocent girlhood.

These thoughts flashed through the mind of Vanlennert, though to outward appearance he was doing the ordinary duties and talking the ordinary talk of a young man in society. He avoided looking again at Maynard seated alone on a sociable with his forehead bent toward the ground; and he thought he noticed that the other people who had looked at Maynard before and smiled at the encounter between him and Lady Aldenborough now did the same thing, and affected to ignore his presence altogether; and Bertie knew that this was a very bad sign. "I wish I could help to get him out of this," he thought, "on Kitty's account." When a moment later he glanced round Maynard had gone.

Presently Herbert took down Miss Johnes-Johnes to have a sandwich before going away, and in the dining-room he saw Maynard again, sitting still by himself with his head in his hand, looking, as before, very pale and wretched. "Confound it! I must get him off," thought Bertie; and as soon as Miss Johnes-Johnes had gone, he went up to his friend.

"I say, you look rather seedy," he said in a low tone to Maynard, sitting down beside him. The other raised his eyes blankly to his face and stared. "I've got to go on to a place in your neighbourhood." Bertie did not mind the obvious improbability of this. "If you've had enough of this we might go on together."

"Enough of it! Good God, I should think so!" Maynard groaned.

"Then we'll go at once," said Bertie, decisively, taking the matter into his own hands. Once he had to give Maynard an arm, and he trusted that no one but the servants had seen it.

"I'm glad I managed it," said Bertie to himself. "Poor Kitty!" A year ago he would have been full of disgust with Maynard. He had sins of his own upon his conscience now

and was less inclined to be severe. "Poor Kitty! It is hard lines on her," he repeated to himself, reviewing all the possible consequences of Maynard's habit if he were, what seemed likely, a confirmed drunkard.

And now they came to the little side door in Spaniard Road, and Bertie went with his friend into the studio. He felt strangely moved at the sight of the room, which he had not entered for many months, and he thought of his first visit there. There was the same cold mystery about the place, in the light of the two candles that they had lighted all the more striking now than then. It seemed really sad to leave Maynard alone under the white pitched roof with the huge blank window staring down at him. And this feeling, too, entered the mind of the artist. He had gone to sleep in the cab; now he awoke more sober, but with a headache and an indescribable sense of wretchedness upon him.

"You're a very good fellow, Vanlennert," he said. "I'm not very well—that's the truth." He gave a faint shudder as he glanced round the room. "Will you—sit down—and stay a few moments?" The request was conventional, but the haggard beseeching look in the eyes gave it point. It was most pitiful. But Herbert could not give expression to his pity.

"Do you think you ought to sit up?" he said, heartily.

"I'm sure of it." And this time a visible shiver passed through Maynard. "I'm—I'm not well in health. But—it's—it's my mind that's worst."

"Oh," said Bertie, again in the same hearty way, "I should say you were one of the most enviable people I know. . . ."

Maynard's thoughts were now elsewhere. He had risen from his seat and walked a few steps towards a cupboard above Vanlennert's head. He got out a bottle and two tumblers.

"Oh, I say!" Bertie cried, turning round and surprised out of his manners. "Do you think you ought to have any more?"

Maynard's brow clouded. "You mean that I am a drunkard," he said, his hand trembling.

"No, I didn't mean anything of the sort," said Vanlennert, as one not to be bullied.

A curious sort of convulsion seemed to pass over the other's frame. It was as if every part of him trembled at once and individually. Bertie beheld the phenomenon with amazement. But he had scarcely time to be astonished when it was all over. Then Maynard filled his glass and sat down again.

"Well, I am," he said, as if he were talking in his sleep. "That's what I am, a drunkard."

And at the same instant there flashed through the mind of the younger man sitting opposite him a revelation—a something that he could not put into words—a sense, strange enough, of his own insignificance by the side of the very man for whose weakness he had, a moment ago, felt such an inward contempt. Nobody equally clever could have been further removed from genius than Herbert Vanlennert was; now for the first time in a flash he got a momentary revelation of what sort of thing genius was, the Eye that sees Heaven open.

—"a drunkard and nothing more." The revelation had come and passed ere Maynard had finished his sentence. Then the speaker's head fell forward and rested upon his hand, as Bertie had seen it resting at the Wendover's supper-table.

And all those people who had seen it—they were, after all, not worthy to tie this man's shoe-laces.

So spoke the inner voice in Bertie's heart; outwardly he could think of nothing better to say than—

"I am very sorry. Couldn't you—do anything?"

Now, however, Maynard awoke to the fact that he had not spoken only to himself but to a man young enough almost to be his son. The fit was passing off him, and he was getting more command of himself every minute. He got up to dismiss his guest not without dignity.

"I ought not to have spoken in that way before you," he said. "Please forget what I have said."

"But I wish I could do anything for you," Bertie answered, more in the attitude of a disciple before his master than he would have deemed possible a minute ago.

"What can you do? Nobody can do anything. . . . You don't understand what it's like."

"But people do get cured," Herbert persisted.

"Yes . . . yes. They do get cured," Maynard spoke as if he considered that this was mere talk from the younger man.

And Herbert Vanlennert recognised the same and took his leave.

When Herbert had gone, Maynard still sat on, so plunged in thought that he forgot to fill his glass. The room looked bare and miserable in the light of those two candles, and it was very cold.

In the early part of the year Maynard had painted a portrait of Lady Aldenborough; and thus, for a month or so, he saw

her every other day. But of late he had seen her seldom—how seldom he realised for the first time fully now. Last year—last year it seemed to him he had scarcely known her; now she had become a part of his every-day thoughts; the idea had become fixed with him—it could not be called passion this fixed idea, hardly even love—an idea burnt into his mind by drink and much solitary musing that there was nothing really worth seeing but her deep liquid eyes.

Vaguely, confusedly, he began to think she avoided him. No; he had not been very sharp—but that sudden excuse that she must go somewhere: it was too much.

And next he thought with horror what he had said to Bertie. He would tell others; she would know. He would never let that fellow come into his house again. And what Bertie *might* say became confounded with what Lady Aldenborough might already know—with her reasons for avoiding him.

The whole world was against him. And he—his occupation—was gone, gone, gone. How horribly those blank canvases stared upon you! At the other end of the room stood the replica of his picture of "Georgina" (so he called her in his thoughts). The pictured Georgina was placed so that she could not see the table at which Maynard used to sit at night and drink. But she was near the door, and he never left or entered the studio without stopping to gaze into those sweet soft eyes; sometimes he lost himself in contemplation.

Only he dared not to-night. Those white canvases closing round him. It was horrible, horrible.

CHAPTER XXX.

A FRIENDSHIP which Herbert Vanlennert had made this spring was that of Lady More, an old friend of his father's and grandfather's. He had just got to know her the year before. This spring she was installed in Hill Street in a house of her own, and was expecting to be joined by her husband; and thence one day in April Bertie had had a note inviting him to dinner.

"If you will not mind having a *tête-à-tête* with an old lady," she wrote, "I shall be very grateful if you will dine with me on Thursday next at eight."

There was a certain absent-minded stateliness in Lady More's manner which was very attractive to Bertie—more especially so now, that it made him feel for the first time quite young once more and took from his shoulders the burden of remorse that sometimes lay heavy there. Why, he often wondered to himself afterwards, should he have talked to this old lady more as he would have talked to Molly than to any one else? (But now, alas! he felt that he had drawn a curtain between himself and Molly.) He had talked, truth to tell, much as his father had at one time of his life talked to the same *confidante* before—and once after—his misdeeds had made him impossible in West Derbyshire society. He revived many memories in the young-old lady, large-nosed, bony, something of petrified girlhood still within her. There never had been, contrary to public belief, actual love-passages between her and Harry Vanlennert.

"It was very, very good of you to come," Lady More said, as he shook hands to take leave, and she looked at him affectionately with her short-sighted grey eyes. She had spoken in a tone full of cordiality, stopping short of the sentimental, which Herbert Vanlennert liked. Here, his instinct told him, was a woman who had known of many sins in others, none in herself, and was largely tolerant.

Kitty was not always in her pious mood. She still clung to Mrs. Ayntree as her best hope and, on the whole, her best friend, and she felt much attachment for the Churtons, for that was also a house in which she had a chance of meeting Bertie, and it was one of the few places where her mother did not try to prevent her going—Maynard was strong on that point. Ionë Churton and Kitty were by way of being good friends still; but as the former was now fully out she had not much time or attention to give to the younger girl, and to regular parties Kitty did not go. At last once when she had come to the Churtons with Mrs. Ayntree to an afternoon at home, she had the pleasure, so great that it bordered on pain, of seeing Bertie enter the room.

"Aren't you ashamed to speak to me, Mr. Vanlennert?" Mrs. Ayntree said in her pleasant way when Bertie shook hands with her and Kitty. "I thought you had cut me altogether—cut both of us, for Kitty is good enough to come and see me very often, and she says you never go to see her—you certainly don't at my house—to say nothing of my husband."

Herbert had hardly looked at Kitty when he shook hands

with her. He knew there was at the back of his thoughts a reason why he did not go and see her now, but could not quite realise what it was, and he felt guilty. How cold her hand felt, and how much more bony, more like a woman's hand, than of old!

"He told me," Mrs. Ayntree was going on, "that he met you the other night dining with Mr. Bradshaw . . ."

"Yes—I'm awfully sorry—not that I met him, but that I haven't been to see you for so long. Well, Kitty, how's the world getting on with you?"

"Oh, pretty well."

"By Jove, you'll be as tall as I am soon—won't she? But the fact is that was almost the only place I've been to for a month, except to look in at the Wendovers' the other night, where I saw your . . . I've hardly any time for going out now. I'm trying to get on at the bar. And I've a certain amount of literary work to do—journalism I mean . . ."

"But what does a country squire like you want with the bar and literary work?" Mrs. Ayntree said.

"Oh, well, I am a country squire in a sense, certainly. But everybody's getting ruined in the country now, you know. I believe it's all the fault of those frightfully unjust radical measures." Herbert said this with one of his old smiles to invite Mrs. Ayntree to a polemic.

She took up the challenge, as she nearly always did.

"After all, 'ruined' is rather a comparative term, isn't it? My dressmaker was telling me this morning a terribly sad story about one of her brothers who was engaged in some very skilled work—at a jeweller's—I don't think it was watchmaking, but something special for which he earned fifty shillings a week. And now his sight has suddenly gone—a cataract is forming, that is to say. And he's quite a young man, not long married—two little children I think she said. They are all utterly unprovided for. That's what I call 'ruin,' Mr. Vanlennert."

"Yes. It is hard luck, very. Still, if I were married my children would be utterly unprovided for." Bertie spoke for the sake of saying something. But a thought suddenly crossed his mind. He remembered Maynard at their last meeting. Suppose he were to die. How far had he provided for that immense family of his? And Herbert looked again sympathetically at Kitty, who, he saw, was looking at him, but at once turned her eyes away. What a sword of Damocles was hanging over the child's head!

Another of Mrs. Ayntree's friends came up to speak to her at that moment.

"Well, Kitty," said Bertie once more, "you're growing up tremendously as the likes of you always do."

"What do you mean by 'the likes of me'?" said Kitty, who had become quite cheerful again.

"Oh, we won't say. There's a proverb . . ."

"Oh, I know about weeds or something—I'm not really particularly tall. I'm seventeen."

"No, really? When?"

"Last month."

"I remember now, you used to have a birthday in April."

"I do still," said Kitty.

"Stupid of me to forget. Well, I'll give you a birthday present."

"Oh, no."

"Oh, *yes*. Now, come along to the conservatory; you'd like an ice, I know."

"Oh, that's my present."

"For the present, your present present. But I'm going to give you another one. What will you have?"

"A biscuit, please."

"You're getting too sharp for anything—cut yourself a piece of cake. Well, I always know what sort of things to give you—books, poetry, something like that."

Kitty inwardly reflected that she would rather he would give her a trinket, if he really was going to give her a birthday present. He had given her a little box of poets last year. But, then, last year the tastes of a woman had barely dawned in her. It was pleasant and yet a little disheartening that Bertie persisted in thinking her so simple and such a child.

Her companion was unconsciously recognising—recognising through his sensations more than his thoughts—that Kitty Maynard was, indeed, nearly grown up. How odd, with such a young-looking father! The scene in Maynard's studio came vividly before him and his heart was all melted with pity—but this time for the daughter.

"Yes," he said in a changed tone which startled his companion, and in reply to nothing but his own thoughts. "It's an awful bore that I seem to see nothing of my friends now scarcely. It's an age since I've seen you till to-day. How are you getting on?"

The change in Herbert's tone made Kitty's thoughts and

mouth fall through sympathy, and also through dread, because he talked of seeing nothing of his friends now.

"Oh, pretty well." She gave a little sigh.

"Only pretty well. I suppose you don't . . . it's awful check of me saying such a thing . . . but I always feel that I'm in a sort of way . . . responsible for you."

He paused, such a look flashed from Kitty's unself-conscious eyes.

"I was going to say that . . . I guess . . . that you and your mother don't quite hit it off, do you?"

This way of talking was quite new from Kitty's hero. And as Bertie's manner became more simple and human—dropping the perpetual chaff that he thought appropriate to a child—Kitty's society manners fell from her.

"I don't know," she said, sighing freely this time. "I like being with Laura—Mrs. Ayntree, better than at home. Except when . . ."

"When what?"

"Except when, when—oh, I can't very well explain." She was thinking of the avenging heavenly powers, and was most anxious to propitiate them at this moment.

"Oh, no—all right. I didn't mean to say 'what?' It was awfully impertinent."

"Oh, no, it wasn't." And once more Kitty's too eloquent eyes were raised to Bertie's face.

"But it must be nice being one of a large family I've always thought," said Herbert, to give a different turn to the conversation.

"You've no brothers and sisters, have you?" said Kitty.

"By Jove, how much more grown-up she is!" he said to himself; and out loud—

"Oh, no, I'm a very solitary person." (This was said quickly so as not to encourage sentiment.) "I've got cousins who are like brothers and sisters to me, all the same. Still, to be regularly one of a large family—don't you like that?"

"No, I don't," said Kitty.

"Really? I suppose you are kept rather strictly. Is that it?"

"I don't know."

How she was relapsing towards monosyllables! There must be something on her mind. She did know about her father, no doubt. That preyed upon her. Probably she did not tell Mrs. Ayntree or anyone. He would have liked to get behind this

barrier of reserve if he could, without being grossly impertinent. As he *did* know already. It would be a comfort for the poor child to have someone she could confide in.

"Yes," Herbert Vanlennert began once more, "I feel like a kind of—godfather, shall I say to you, Kitty? And if there's anything . . . bothering you at any time that . . . that you don't like to tell anybody else . . . I hope . . . you'll tell me." And as he said this he put out his hand and laid it upon Kitty's.

Her little gloved hands were on the railing of the balcony outside the conservatory, and she was steadily looking away. The change in Bertie's voice was almost too much to bear, but when there came in addition this touch of his hand it was worse.

"Oh, you're . . . I," Kitty began with her eyes cast down. Then to her consternation something caught her by the throat and she could not go on. Suddenly she gave a little sob and turned away. At the same moment Herbert Vanlennert was conscious of a drop of moisture on his hand.

"My poor dear," he said, "what is it?" But still Kitty's head was obstinately turned away. She was biting her lips till they almost bled: only her shoulders showed that silent sobs were shaking her.

"I can't . . . speak . . . just . . . now," at last Kitty got out gruffly.

"No, no, not now," said Herbert; "and at this place. But whenever you like tell me, not before. I'll go now."

Kitty gave him her hand without looking, and he gave it a sort of slight caress.

"Oh—thank you," she said, in the same gruff voice.

Herbert felt full of virtue and goodness and of kindness to the human race as he went back to his dinner.

But why during dinner did his thoughts stray, not to Kitty, but to Bess Kirtle, and linger on the memory of the wonderful glances that *she* could give, if she chose, out of her bright eyes?

Thursday. He might catch her at home and alone if he left at once. Then she would insist on his taking her out somewhere and to supper afterwards, and, in fact, on an infinitude of expenses that he could not afford. He had got another brief, too, and ought to be hard at work with that. Where the devil would this lead him? But those bright eyes, her delightful smile, too—he must see them once again.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BEATRICE KIRTLE was a young woman of many activities and of a free and lively estimate of this world and its businesses and desires. She did not let her appreciation of things grow faint by too long use. A month ago—for the preceding chapter is now a month old—she had been for quite half a year under the protection of an amiable gentleman neither too old nor too *exigeant*. But this slender thread of authority began to drag upon her, and, without tears on either side, the connection was broken. It was still early enough in the season for her to renew a bowing acquaintance with the stage, and she next made one in a chorus at the Lyric at that time—ten years or more ago—in its early and most successful years. Whether that engagement still held good Herbert Vanlennert did not know. He did not feel that a girl who had to go on the stage at eight would be likely to invite a friend to tea at five, as she had invited him for this afternoon; but he was not sufficiently acquainted with these matters to feel sure. A certain sinking of the heart, a feeling of nausea always came over him when he speculated on Miss Kirtle's mode of life. The old gentleman was a fact that had to be digested. But on any possible younger lover he never liked to think. The truth is that Beatrice Kirtle had such an extraordinary *bonhomie* and aplomb that suspicions seemed to die down in her presence. She had too wonderful changes of temper from a gentle melancholy to a steely self-satisfaction, which again was overshot by sudden gleams of avarice and almost of cruelty.

Bertie sadly reflected on these things on his way to Ebury Street, where Miss Kirtle had now set up her tabernacle. He was always hoping and half believing that he inspired her with a genuine affection and that for his sake she was going to reform her ways. (To what lengths the reform was to go he had never settled even in his own mind, so that all his hopes were vague enough.) He had now, however, to reflect that in these new lodgings and in the present condition of things the last change seemed likely to be far away from reform.

He heard much laughter as he made his way upstairs, and then, when the servant announced him, Miss Kirtle's voice: "Well, show him in, show him in."

His friend received him in a handsome Japanese tea-gown. But it had the look of having been put on over an incomplete toilette.

She was more affectionate and more demonstrative than usual. "That's a good boy," she said, taking his hat from him. "I suppose those are some sweets for me. He always brings me those things; isn't he a good little boy?" She turned to two other women—ladies shall I say?—who were in the room too. One was an old one, handsomely dressed, with grey hair, a pinched mouth, and eyes that looked as if they were always on guard.

She first bowed to Bertie primly enough, and thereupon opened her eyes and stared strangely: the other girl nodded. It wasn't very pleasant company for Herbert.

"Oh, yes," Miss Kirtle went on, "we value these things according to the hand that brings them, don't we, Lottie? more than pearls and diamonds when they're not genuine. Don't look sad, dear boy," she went on, patting Bertie's cheek.

Lottie gave a meaningless little splutter and then looked grave again, with her eyes full of water. And this splutter became infectious.

"We were talking" (splutter) "about the ball at Rose Dawson's last week. You wasn't there, was you, Mrs. Pigott?" (splutter.)

"What's the matter with you, Miss Kirtle?" said the elder lady, whose merriment seemed rather factitious. "Is she often took like this, Mr. . . ."

But at this point the joke became too funny and they all burst into a roar of laughter. Miss Kirtle stopped herself first.

"How silly this is! I don't know what we are laughing at, I'm sure. And it's very rude, isn't it?" she went on to Bertie. "You'd have a right to be 'shirty,' as they say, if you weren't the best-tempered fellow in the world, wouldn't he, Mrs. Pigott?" And this time she put her hand under Bertie's chin and gave him a kiss.

She looked awfully pretty, with an unaccustomed flush on her cheeks and unusual brightness in her eyes. But certainly Bertie reflected he had never seen her like that before. And suddenly it flashed on him with an indescribable shock that she had been drinking. This was the girl whom he was always going to reform.

Perhaps Miss Kirtle discerned something of his thoughts, for she made a great effort to be correct in her demeanour. "I suppose you'd like some tea," she said, biting her lip. . . .

They tried to talk commonplace on the ball. But Bertie, who was never at home in this sort of society, rather foundered in his talk.

"Oh, they are lovely!" said Miss Kirtle, opening the box and putting a fondant into her mouth. "Try one, Lottie. . . . Well I never!" she said. "What am I thinking of? I've never introduced you to these two ladies. This is Miss Treherne, who's with me at the Lyric, and that's Mrs. Piggot, her cousin—Mr. Vanlennert."

"Christ save us!"

Everybody started and turned to Mrs. Piggot, who made this exclamation. Her whole demeanour was changed. "What name did you say, not Vanlennert?"

"Yes, that's my name," said Bertie haughtily.

"My Christ! I've been looking at you all the time. You're just . . . you've her look all over. And *his* voice you've got. . . ."

"Who the devil . . ."

"Who are you talking" began Herbert and Miss Kirtle in a breath.

"Why, Polly, our Polly."

"Who was 'our Polly'?" said Miss Kirtle, with sarcastic emphasis.

"Polly: Polly was my sister. That's what Polly was—and Vanlennert was the name of the fellow who took her off and—married 'er: that I'll swear to!" But Mrs. Piggot was sobering down from her first excitement and saw some of the absurdity of it after all these years.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Herbert, angrily. But his face had turned very white.

"His name was Vanlennert, that's all I know, and that I swear to," said Mrs. Piggot. "And his other name was—well, if I haven't forgotten. It was Dick—or else it was 'Arry."

"It was Tom, Dick, or Harry," put in Miss Treherne.

"Ah, well, you may laugh, Miss Treherne. Well, I won't say I weren't mistaken." She was recovering consciousness that Herbert was a gentleman and not a person to be trifled with. "It was your being so like—leastways it struck me at first—made me call out. Anyway," she went on, bristling at a look of disgust which Herbert could not suppress, "no one had need to be ashamed of my poor sister. She was as good a lady as any you'd find anywhere—and wonderfully clever too—such a reader she was."

Miss Kirtle put in a remark about a current topic and the whole conversation changed. Mrs. Pigott did not join in, but seemed absorbed in thought; and once Bertie saw her furtively wiping away a tear.

He avoided speaking to her again, and soon took his leave.

"What a fool you've been with your talk!" he heard Miss Kirtle say angrily. But the conclusion of the sentence was lost. It only rang in his ears as the last articulate thing that his mind could retain as he wandered vaguely about the streets of Pimlico in a world that was utterly strange to him; for he was able to concentrate his thoughts on no single object. By an effort of will he succeeded in getting himself into a cab and driving home: he could never have remembered the way.

All sorts of jumbled experiences of the last few days and months rose up before him. His last interview with Kitty at her home, and the previous one at the Churtons', his talk with Bertram some weeks ago, a talk with Lady More in which she had just mentioned his father and no more, but with a certain tone of reserve and sadness which Herbert's ears had caught. He could not tell why these things rose up before him; but as they rose each put on a new face and seemed parts of some shameful tragedy he was playing in. And these recent experiences were striving with long past recollections which his unconscious will was doing all it could to keep down. For though Bertie vigorously refused to think for one moment of the scene just past, all the depths of his being, his memory, his self-esteem, his instinct of self-preservation, recognised it as the greatest shock that he had ever received.

"Why?" He found no answer to this question, because he refused to put it frankly to himself.

Herbert had learned to know something of that wretched class of women—not always vicious themselves—who figure sometimes as the aunts and cousins, sometimes as the mothers, or sometimes again as only the friends and duennas, of certain among actresses, music-hall artists, ladies of the ballet, even the superior kind of *femmes galantes*, and who extend the quasi-respectability of their grey hairs as a cloak to the amours of their younger companions, not in the interests of virtue, but to enhance the market value of the latter.

A thousand unnoticed trifles of his childhood remembrances, slight whispers, raised eyebrows, tones of voice, things that had seemed to him then to be natural to the status of a child in a solitary house, were trooping unbidden into his brain, which

throbbed with a feverish heat. But, though it burnt and throbbed, it remained firm in this one thing, that he never once consciously recalled the scene that had just passed or asked himself its meaning. Or perhaps once only: once the thought did frame itself clearly. "That woman my aunt!" Even then it stopped short of the more terrible form of the same proposition. "That woman my mother's sister!"

Ah! The vision of her wiping away that tear: that was the worst of all. It was cauterised upon Herbert's brain. For at that moment Mrs. Pigott had a far-off likeness to another face of an old woman that Bertie had once or twice seen, as he almost fancied, in his dreams.

Now for the first time Herbert Vanlennert found how much a part of his nature had been a gentle pride of gentle blood. And henceforward among his friends he was to move with almost the burden of an undetected crime. There was nothing outwardly changed in his position: in his own estimate of it there was everything changed. It was now he first felt keenly the loss of those material advantages which he had missed so much less than he expected at the time he parted from them. Silvia had cloaked for him the loss of his home at Netley, after he had enjoyed the position of squire in its full importance for one year subsequent to his quitting the university. How that year came back upon him now! and what a traitor he felt to himself and his name that even love should have ever made him *not* regret it! The pleasant walks and rides he had had during those fourteen months—no real responsibility (for he was not yet of age) but much respect. Never again, if the estate should be disencumbered by a miracle and he go back there once again, could he feel as he felt before—

"Which thou owedst yesterday."

All this he knew; but he never once said one word of it to himself. Only he went about always with the weight of this unknown, undiscovered crime.

He never saw Miss Kirtle again. That passion was burnt out of him at once and for ever. His career of vice had begun and ended. All thoughts of the other sex were in an inextricable unspeakable way bound up with horror of his own father's amours, of his mother's possible origin—in the awful vision of that old Mrs. Pigott and her furtive tear.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"I HEAR that you are writing a book, Mr. Vanlennert," said Sir Hardinge More, turning towards Bertie.

It was in the Mores' dark, three-windowed drawing-room. There had been several callers that afternoon, but only two groups remained. Sir Edward Flemming was talking to Lady More, and General Mills and his party were grouped round Sir Hardinge. Bertie belonged now to this group, for he had been talking social nothings to Miss Mills.

Mrs. Mills looked round likewise when Sir Hardinge made this speech.

"Are you really?" said Miss Mills. "How clever of you! What sort of a book? I hope it's a novel."

"Oh, no," said Bertie, surprised.

"Well, so Tatton Brydges told me," said Sir Hardinge. And then he went on with his talk to General Mills. "We're sure to have a long speech from old Cumberbatch," he said. "I shall cut down what I have to say as short as possible."

"How I should like to be there!" said Mrs. Mills, with fervour.

"How do you feel like when you make a speech?" put in the daughter, in her *espiègle* way. "But I suppose you are so used to that now that you don't mind."

"Mind, no!" said Sir Hardinge, squaring his shoulders and trying to look gruff and soldier-like, and insensible to female flattery. "Fortunately there are no ladies there," he went on, unbending to smile on Miss Mills. "They are the only people who make you nervous."

"That's what I think is such a shame!" Mrs. Mills began again.

"That you should make men nervous? So do I," said Herbert.

"No; I meant that we should not be allowed to see the dinner they are giving to Sir Hardinge at the Oriental," Lady Mills answered, in the same voice of a devotee.

"I thought Rivers talked a great deal of nonsense at the Lord Mayor's dinner the other night," said General Mills.

"Well, so did I, I'm bound to say," said Sir Hardinge.

"Are you going to the dinner?" Miss Mills said to Bertie.

"No; I wish I was. I don't belong to the Oriental, you see, and I've nothing to do with India," he answered.

"Have you never been there?"

"Oh, no."

"But you'll go some day, shan't you? So many people go to India now."

"Yes," said Sir Hardinge. "You must come out and pay us a visit." He spoke in a slightly patronizing way.

"That would be delightful for you," said the devout Mrs. Mills.

"What part of India do you live in?" Herbert asked the daughter.

"Multân, unfortunately."

"Well, fortunately for Multân."

"Thanks."

"But why unfortunately for you?"

"Oh, you should come and see. It's . . ."

"Nothing I should like better, provided . . . It's what?"

"Provided what?"

"You're mixing me up. I'm not a salad. 'Provided you're still there,' of course, was what I was going to say."

"I don't believe it was. You thought of that afterwards."

"Now we've got away from 'it's.'"

"It's?"

"Well, that's very kind of you—very kind indeed," Bertie heard Sir Edward Flemming say to Lady More as he stood up to shake hands. "Of course, she will feel a little *dépassée*, as the French say, at first." And now he came on to Sir Hardinge.

"Cut it short, More, to-night," he said. "They do you very well at the Oriental, and after a good dinner the less said the better."

"You need not be afraid of me. Try and get Cumberbatch to do the same."

The cordial way in which Sir Hardinge spoke to Sir Edward impressed Bertie agreeably, and contrasted with his rather stiff manner in talking to the Millses. But Herbert only noticed this in a hurried glance, as he was still engaged in his half-flirtation with Miss Mills.

Lady More approached their group. But now the Millses, the last of the callers, rose to go, and when they had said good-bye, Bertie began to do the same.

"Now, why shouldn't you stay here and dine with my wife

—just as you are?" said Sir Hardinge, putting his hand on Herbert's shoulder. (Mrs. Mills, who was just going out, saw the movement, and her eyes sent a sort of holy benediction on the young man.) "Have you asked anyone for to-night, Lizzie?"

"No; I should be so pleased if you would," said Lady More, with that shy manner which she often had in the presence of her husband.

Herbert felt honoured by that touch on his shoulder, though he would have been less sensible of the honour had it not been for the look of awed congratulation which he had seen in Mrs. Mills' eyes. Lady More herself recognised that her husband was in an especially benign mood. There had been a very flattering article on the Governor-designate of Bombay in the *Times* of that morning, and that was sure to bring the enthusiasm of the dinner to-night almost to fever pitch.

This was the second *tête-à-tête* dinner that Bertie had had with Lady More, and before the end he felt quite enthusiastic about her.

"I heard Sir Hardinge asking you to pay us a visit after we've got out," said his hostess. "Why shouldn't you think of it?"

"Oh, well," he answered, smiling back in his frank way, "you know one can't accept every invitation like that."

"But I invite you too," said Lady More. "I really think the change might do you good; and if you wanted anything to write about . . ."

"But why does everyone suppose that I want to write about things? I am not a literary chap. I'm only a journalist in a small way."

"You've got a great reputation in Derbyshire," said Lady More, smiling.

Then she returned to the subject that they had discussed earlier at dinner—they were now sitting once more in the huge shady drawing-room stuffed with furniture. It looked by lamplight almost infinite, with its recesses and its shadows—the subject of West Derbyshire and the people there; for the Mores had just come back from a Whitsuntide visit at Stretton Park. Some unrecognised instinct, some reminiscence of long ago, made Lady More hover round this subject.

"I fell so much in love with your cousin Molly," she said. "I quite hope to persuade her to come and stay with me before the season's over."

"Oh, that would be awfully jolly," said Bertie. "Yes, Molly's no end of a brick. . . . She always seems so happy and contented," he added.

They had been talking quite cheerfully up to that moment, but as he said this last sentence Bertie's tone of voice took a sudden change.

"You talk as if it was strange for a person to be happy and contented," said Lady More, smiling a little sadly.

"No; but it must be rather dull," Bertie began. But his thoughts outstripped his speech. The picture which he called up of Molly's monotonous life made him think of Bertram's, and then of how he had said to himself some time since that Bertram and Lady More were the only friends in London on whom he could rely. And once again he made an appeal similar to that which he had made to his male friend.

"I'd give you anything," he said, and as before, the strength of his feelings made him start from his chair and pace the room, "if you'd find me some occupation—something sensible to do."

Lady More smiled more visibly. "Find you something to do—I?" she said.

Herbert too smiled, but his face was overcast in a moment.

"No, I'm not joking. I've asked lots of people." (Bertram stood for the "lots" of people.) "I don't know how it is, I'm different from everybody else, somehow. I . . ."

As he said these words he felt a sudden deadly pang at his heart. Once more the scene at Beatrice Kirtle's rose before his mind's eye. It had been fading somewhat, but now it spoke with a vividness and an intention it never had possessed before—Lady More, the talk about Netley and his grandfather that they had had, gave a fearful edge to this sudden recollection. He turned ashy pale, a cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

Lady More saw this sudden transformation. "Do you mean that there is anything—that you have done anything . . ." she began, vaguely.

(No, that was a point on which he could never speak to any human being.)

"Done anything? I don't know. Not worse than anyone else, I suppose," he began.

"Ah, I think it is a pity when young men look at things in that way," the other was beginning on her side.

But Herbert's thoughts were elsewhere. "I hate my life,"

he said, in a tone of such bitterness that Lady More stopped in her speech and waited for some confession. (Could she, ought she, to say anything to him about his father? That was the crucial question. If for want of that she let this boy go to ruin, would not that be the worst treachery to the memory of that poor dead friend?)

"Oh, not in the way you mean," Herbert went on. "I've not got into any scrape or spent any money to speak of, or . . . But I shall, that's the long and the short of it, if I don't get anything regular and sensible to do."

"Ah! I believe there's a great deal of truth in that. Your father . . ."

"Yes. I suppose my father did get into a lot of messes," Herbert said, looking at her keenly.

"If he'd never sold out I believe it would have been all right. Your grandfather thought, quite naturally, he ought to come home and look after the duties of the estate."

"That's such rot. People are always talking to me about the duties of the estate."

"How like him you are!" Lady More said, softly.

(Again the fearful pang shot through Bertie's heart. "You've got 'er look all over and his voice!" Should he ever forget those hateful words?)

"I'm afraid it can't be true what he said just now, that he has not got into any scrape," Lady More thought, sadly. "And yet how frank he seems! There's that difference between him and poor Harry." Then she went into a minute's reverie.

"Don't you think," she said at last, "that it might really be a good thing if you do what we talked of just now, and come out to us in Bombay for a little while? You said just now that you hated your life. . . . I don't ask why, but I suppose there must be some reason, some . . ." (But suppose there were some chain which he could not honourably break, she thought.) "I only hope there is nothing serious . . ."

That was an idea! Now, for the first time, Herbert took in all its possibilities. Surely, surely, in this new world he might shake off the temptations and the associations of his present, which hung round him like a fog. To have *one* more chance, to begin life again. . . . Ah, that was nonsense, when one came to think of it. This would be only a visit. Yet even for a while to escape, to turn round and contemplate himself, as it were, and look at his future. He paid little or no atten-

tion to Lady More's last sentence, but he turned on her a look of hope.

"It's awfully kind of you," he began.

"Oh, don't talk in that way. I've never told you quite, but your father and I were old friends once. Only I must ask one question. You said you had not got into any scrape—but are you sure there is no entanglement which . . ."

"Oh, no, on my honour, nothing of *that* sort," Herbert spoke at once in answer to the sense of the query.

On his way home he realised that this word "entanglement" in the mouth of his father's friend might have a fatal significance with regard to the past.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"ONLY this morning," said Bertie to himself, "I awoke in St. James's Place." His eyes fastened vaguely upon the bare landscape of France and on a *chaussée* with double row of poplars which stretched over the brow of a hill, while it uncurled like a lash with the movement of the train. Then he thought with sorrow of his leave-taking at Gretton, with sorrow that he had not felt more sorrow. Molly's pale face and trembling lip and affected cheerfulness came back with the most keen stab. For he had not confided to Molly all his thoughts and hopes—hopes, as he knew, involving a long, long separation from them all. The hopes were too vague. Yet surely it must be possible to find in this new world some response to his longings—everything now seemed concentrated into this desire—to find some real and reasonable work to do. By others it was assumed that this was only a pleasure visit. But there are ways of divination beyond the reach of words, and Molly's pale face still haunted Bertie's thoughts. Equally impossible was it for him to explain to her that London held in its circle a vague horror from which he must escape.

He was rushing in the Brindisi mail through France. He was hurried across the great flatness of reaped fields and villages brown and grey. A stretch of wood arose now and again above the horizon line and showed deep indigo. Bertie knew

nothing of art, or the contrast of the yellow fields and of these blue woods would have struck his fancy.

When night came on, hills were beginning to arise on either hand and to shut in the view ; and sometimes a gap showed far below a momentary picture of a little town with high-pitched clock-tower, red roofs, and a canal with poplar fringe. Then the hills and darkness closed in together, and the last thing that Vanlennert remembered distinctly of the outer world was the sight of the evening star above a rounded purple height.

That moment he was keenly awake : the next he seemed to himself, still awake, to be caught up out of the world of sense. His whole past life began to unroll before him scene upon scene, without the exercise of any act of will. The peculiar pattern of the carpet in his old day-nursery and the intense pleasure he had had in tracing its gradations of colour ; the cupboard which Mrs. Marshall used to unlock to get out certain of his toys ; the sound of the church-bells, a chime of five, which came from beyond the trees ; his after-dinner appearance in the dining-room and rather awful seat upon his grandfather's knee ; certain among the visitors at Netley whom he had liked and for such bizarre reasons ; one, as he remembered, because he had a watch-chain of the same pattern as a certain iron chain which had given him an intense pleasure at the very beginning of things—somewhere—with his father?—not at Netley.

Scene after scene passed by. Bertie, usually so alert, had lost sight of everything else, forgotten that he was rushing through Burgundy, that he had a fellow-passenger in the opposite corner of the carriage. More and more he was sinking or rising into an out-world condition—what the Greeks called ecstasy—such as usually comes only through the effect of opium.

To the scenes succeeded persons. Bertram was there. Lady More was there : and little Kitty Maynard with eyes that had a look of warning in them. Beatrice Kirtle was there. And there were troops approaching.

“ By Heaven ! ” Herbert said to himself, “ I know what it is I am dead. I must have died in the night ; and it is the Day of Judgment that is coming. ” And in saying this he seemed to see the connection between those visions which had passed before him. For Mrs. Marshall had been used on Sunday afternoons to read to him from a class of literature which she deemed suitable to the day and the auditor ; and this literature

much to do with the Day of Judgment and with children had died young. "It was all true, then, after all," Bertie told himself, remembering how he used as a child to expect the day to set out for a walk and suddenly come, so to say, at the beginning of the end of the world. Persons with kindled bonfires who were going to burn up the earth and the heavens—"like a great scroll;" that enigmatical text was often in his mind in those days. It had been one of the dreams which haunted his pillow as a child—that he walked out into the village, past the larger of the two walled gardens, past the fields, and then emerged on the village street; and there were fires and lighted tar-barrels, and some strange faces, along with many familiar ones. Those had been childish forewarnings. Now the end of the world was here with all these perils, and he should see . . .

His mother! That was the thought he had been trying not to notice. How shameful! As a child he had still gone back to his mother for some tenderness, some recollection, to infinitely vague memories—some one in bed whom he had kissed and had kissed many times as it seemed. And now?

Was it possible that now at the Judgment Day he was prepared to deny his own mother? From prejudice of rank?—from other? "Am I not eternally damned for such a thought?" Hereupon came a violent shaking and upheaval, as if the earth were indeed going to be dissolved. "Just what was going to happen," Herbert said to himself. Then he was thrown up to the ceiling—of something, and fell back against—something else. Then he fell back.

In his ears was a violent screaming, which seemed to concentrate into one long-continued noise. The ground on which he was lying sloped at an angle of twenty degrees from the horizontal. Then he had a notion of something between him and the bottom of the slope disappearing and leaving a door wide open. It was daylight.

Was he—was he not—still on the habitable earth? The visions of the night had been so keen and real that he was still under their empire. He had been waiting—yes, for his mother to come in at that open door. And amid the general darkness one principle remained with him, to wait to see what would happen, what punishment was about to fall on his head; he was filled with remorse and shame. If eternity had already arrived there was no longer any need for hurry.

Presently he came more to himself. He saw now what had

happened—the train had run off the line. But even now his former notions and his natural character kept him quiescent. He slowly unfolded himself from his rug and tried to stand upon the sloping floor. And as he did this Nature reasserted herself: he gave a vast yawn, shutting both his eyes.

He opened them to find the head and shoulders of his fellow-traveller appearing in the doorway.

“Ma foi,” said the old man, “vous avez du sang-froid. Moi je suis général; mais je n’ai pas envie de me faire casser les os quand même.”

And at this another man with a thick red-brown beard, who also was looking in at the side window, gave a hearty laugh. “Yes, I should advise you to come out of this when you’ve done your nap,” he said, and passed on.

Bertie’s every-day sensations had come back to him. “Oh, it’s—c’est un accident?” he said.

“Ma foi, oui, mais sauvez vous,” said the old Frenchman, who had seized his valise and now dropped out of sight.

Bertie went to the door. All this while there was a screaming in his ears. He saw that it came from the engine, where steam was rushing from a hole in the boiler. A few yards ahead of him the engine lay at the bottom of a low embankment. His own carriage was lying against the parapet of a bridge, which was broken at the top, and the rest so cracked that it threatened to give way; but on the other side of the parapet was a foot-path. Many of his fellow-travellers were still on this path, and seemed to be rushing wildly about, calling and screaming. He judged it better to step upon the parapet and walk along it to the end. Already he saw one or two persons being covered with tarpaulings and rugs and carried away; one of them was screaming, another groaning loudly. But it was found in the event that no fatality and only one serious injury had been caused by this running off the rails. In the course of a few hours a new mail train was organized, and the passengers were carried to their destination.

But in Herbert’s mind there remained a strange and superstitious feeling as if two fates had been contending for him, and as if the Angel of Death had come near enough to overshadow him with his wing.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE ship climbed slowly up the round of earth out of the immeasurable sea. Islands and headlands swam into sight, bare and of a reddish-brown. Farther to the left a green hill uprose, and then near the base thereof a brown-and-white patch was to be seen—then the traveller took note of a column in mid-water painted black and red and white.

“That’s the Prong Lighthouse,” said Colonel Butts, coming to Bertie’s side.

But the other did not answer. The magic sunlight had got into his brain. It caught up all that was visible to the eye—the islands and headlands, the Arab dhows with their wide goose-wing sails, the white troop-ship straight ahead, and it translated them from earth as Elijah was translated.

“No doubt,” thought Bertie, coming to himself, “I shall get used to this. It seems commonplace enough to the colonel.

“By Jove, they are all palm-trees.” For the green mass on the left enlarged itself into well-defined trees. At the same time out of the brown-and-white block beside it towers and cupolas began to show.

“This is the outside of the three forts in the bay,” Colonel Butts went on, “and just to the right of that gun-boat—the white ship there is a gun-boat, you know—that’s Elephanta. That will be one of the first places they’ll take you to, I’ve no doubt—see the caves, you know—one of the regular sights.”

“Ah, yes, no doubt,” said Herbert, rather absent.

Fragments of conversation floated round him.

“Oh, I’ve no doubt my husband’s written for a room for me at Watson’s. We shan’t try to go on.”

“Ah, well. I shall catch the mail easy enough. So I’m afraid it will be good-bye for the present. Perhaps we shall meet at Lahore for Christmas week.”

“I hope so, I’m sure.”

“Oh, dear, no,” said another lady to another man, “I’ve got three days more of it. I transship at once to a B. I. There’s the ship, I fancy.”

“Ah, you go on to Kurachee. That’s not a B. I. That’s more likely her to the left of the *Abyssinia*.”

“Oh, I think it is; yes, you’re right.”

"Well, that's much the best way. But my wife's been so ill this voyage, I've settled to go overland."

"Everybody abuses the B. I. ships. But I find them fairly comfortable."

"It all depends whether the decks are very crowded or not. The smell of those chaps is awful sometimes."

"Well, Mr. Vanlennert, what do you think of Bombay?" Mrs. Yeastman came up to say.

Though everybody was more or less in a bustle of preparation a good many of Vanlennert's acquaintance managed to stroll up and say a word or two to him, and many of the ladies turned round and sought to catch his eye. "I dare say we shall meet again soon," said Lady Harbottle, the High Court Judge's wife, with a good deal of *empressement*, as she squeezed Bertie's hand.

A steam launch with blue-and-yellow pennant came into view. "Hollo! Here's the Government House launch," said some of the passengers.

"Yes. It's for Mr. Vanlennert. . . . That young man over there—don't you see? just under those davits. He's come to stay at Government House," said the better informed.

"I suppose I ought to be looking after my luggage," Herbert said, hoping to escape from these attentions.

"I shouldn't trouble about that. They'll manage all that for you," said Mrs. Yeastman.

For a long time, much like vultures, who from invisible heights in the clear air discern a dying camel in the desert, numberless harbour boats had spread their wide felucca sails and made towards the *Everest*. And now, as these boats crowded round, an unspeakable clamour arose. Barefooted natives pushed each other to get up the companion, and were driven down again by one of the ship's officers. But always they returned to the assault; one or two succeeded in swinging themselves over the bulwarks. Anon the way was opened, and the whole black mass in dirty and scanty white rags swarmed over the deck.

"Don't you let those fellows bother you," said Colonel Butta. "Hat jao—jahannumko jao, you——" he said, lifting his cane. The native sprang back grinning.

A young officer came up the gangway in a well-fitting light tweed suit and white helmet. He was tall and fair, with rather a round face, and looked, Bertie thought, delightfully English and at home; and there was something attractive in the slight

moustache, which did not cover his mouth, but was long enough to make a tiny upward twist over each corner of it. He turned back to speak to a tall, black-bearded native who followed him, splendidly clad in a dark-blue tunic and yellow *kamaband*, and with a blue-and-yellow turban on, with a brooch in it.

"Here's young Masters come for you, no doubt," said Colonel Butts. "How do you do, Masters?"

"How do you do?" said the other, with a faint touch of condescension. "I am looking for . . ."

"This is Mr. Vanlennert, if you're looking for him. Mr. Vanlennert, Mr. Masters."

"Ah! How do you do," said the young aide-de-camp very cordially. "You come along with me. That chap will look after your luggage," and he spoke some words of Hindustanee to the native. "If you'd just show him what you've got. He speaks English all right. I'll stay and wait for you by the gangway. Then we'll go off in the launch."

Herbert came up again, and found Mr. Masters and the colonel talking by the gangway. "Good-bye," he said to the latter, "and thanks very much. I hope we shall meet soon."

"Sure to, I hope. You have my address," the colonel replied to his fellow-passenger, shaking hands with great cordiality.

"Ready! Good-bye, colonel," said the aide. "Perhaps I'd better go first." And in a moment they were in the launch and steaming across the bay, watched by many of the passengers on board the *Everest*.

Herbert came down to dinner with his mind all confused, and the confusion and uncertainty remained upon him. The company which he found in the long room with its verandah and a view out on to the black night was so utterly English that the sights which he had seen that afternoon, the swarming natives on deck and in the boats, the wild cries in the streets, contrasting with the silent footfall of the barefooted natives and of the beasts which passed along the road, the bullock carts with their Homeric mild-eyed oxen, the thick dust, and in the air the ceaseless circling of kites, these things seemed to fade away into a land of unrealities. He made vigorous efforts and kept his attention enough awake to talk to the young woman he had taken in to dinner, Mrs. Abernethy, and to Lady More, on whose right hand he was placed. The talk was like London talk, and yet different and not easy for him to join in.

"Well, what do you think of Bombay, Mr. Vanlennert?" said Mrs. Abernethy to him.

"Oh, I think a great many things of Bombay, but nothing I should mind repeating," he replied.

"How many times have you been asked that question already, Herbert?" Lady More said to him. He looked up surprised at anything like sarcasm from her: she, too, seemed different from what he had known her in London.

Mrs. Abernethy seemed disconcerted, but only for a moment. The next she was deep in a conversation with Captain Scarlett on the other side.

"Oh, yes, what fun we had out there! Do you remember that little white brute who took me down to Neral that day? What do you call him?" Captain Scarlett said.

"Well, we call him just that—the little white brute. He always goes by that name. We always speak of him in that way—the little white brute. My husband wanted to sell him."

"He's a beggar to go, all the same."

"Oh, yes, he can go. But he's *such* a brute."

"All the same, he goes like anything. I should have missed my train with any other pony who began backing and kicking like he did."

"Oh, he can go, no doubt of that, but he's got such a head . . ." and Bertie heard no more, for Lady More spoke to him, and they talked for some time.

"I saw Heathcote this afternoon, Lady More," presently said one of the aides-de-camp from the middle of the table. "He was in a mighty rage with your coachman for driving through his ranks on the march back."

"Well, it was really his fault, Lord William. There ought to have been no gaps in the ranks."

"So it was, of course."

"They were in column of route."

"Ah!" said Lord William, with a half laugh. "Ye know too much, Lady More."

"What was that?" said Sir Hardinge from his end.

"Why, it was Heathcote, sir. I was telling Lady More that he was furious with your coachman for driving through his regiment, sir. And she says it was his fault for not keeping close order, and I say Lady More's too sharp for us, sir."

Sir Hardinge gave a short laugh, and his wife coloured slightly in the school-girlish way that Herbert had often

noticed in her, and he could not help feeling that Mrs. Abernethy was avenged.

"At all events," said Lord William to his chief, "we didn't get our cavalry tied up with the field guns this time; eh, sir?"

Sir Hardinge tried to look reproving, but smiled slightly under his moustache. Nobody else—unless it were Lady More—caught the allusion in Lord William Rothsay's speech, which was to a blunder made by the commander-in-chief of Bombay in a review at Poona the previous month.

"You've just missed our little tomâsha," said Mrs. Abernethy, turning to Bertie again.

"Missed who, did you say?" he asked.

"I beg your pardon—tomâsha's what I said. It means a show of some sort. There was a review of the Bombay garrison this afternoon. It's the end of the race week, and the governor"—she looked towards Sir Hardinge—"went out in state, and we all sat in the grand stand."

After dinner there was a small and early dance. Among other guests Bertie noticed a rather too thin, red-haired girl come up and speak to his neighbour at the dinner-table.

"Here you are, dear," said Mrs. Abernethy. She was already surrounded by several men, and all of these spoke also to the red-haired girl, and began writing down engagements on their cuffs. Then the girl went to speak to Lady More, and Herbert noticed, as she did so, that her face changed pleasantly to a tender, almost filial expression. Lady More beckoned to Bertie to come up.

"Herbert," she said—it was the second time that evening that she had called him by his Christian name—"I want to introduce you to Miss Abernethy." She managed to give a certain emphasis to the presentation as if she had said—

"Now, you are the two young people whom I take most interest in of all my guests."

"You feel very queer landing in a place like this, so utterly different from England," he said to Miss Abernethy.

"Do you find it so very—I don't know—of course the weather is very different from what it would be at this time of year," she said.

"Yes. It's tremendously hot."

"I dare say you find it so. The hot month is just over though; October is sometimes as hot as any month here—the early part of October."

"Dear me. That's odd. That's not the case all over India, I suppose."

"I—don't know. I think so. No; perhaps it's only in Bombay."

"Yes. I remember. I think my guide-book says that about Bombay—that it's very hot in the autumn."

"Oh, does it? I dare say that is so."

"Have you travelled much about India?"

"Oh, no. I haven't travelled at all."

"Do you mean . . ." Bertie was beginning, but he checked himself.

"Of course I've been to Matheran. We go there every summer, and to Poona," Miss Abernethy put in. "We went there the year I came out."

"Have you been out more than a year, then?"

"Oh, yes; I came here two years ago. Isn't Bombay a beautiful place? Don't you think so?"

"It's awfully interesting and curious."

"Have you been to the top of the hill? The view from there is said to be the most beautiful in the world. And it's very nearly as good from here, only you can't see it at night."

"She seems a nice simple sort of girl," said Herbert to himself; "but what Lady More can find special to like in her I cannot make out." "I expect this sort of thing is rather a bore for Lady More," he said out loud, following the bent of his thoughts.

"Oh, I *hope* not," said Miss Abernethy in a voice which seemed slightly shocked.

"I mean she didn't seem to go in for society and that sort of thing much in London."

"You know her very well, don't you?" Miss Abernethy still spoke in veiled tones.

"Oh, not very. She knew my father and grandfather and that sort of thing; and I got to see a good deal of her last summer. She's a most awful *brick*, you know, Lady More. Don't you think so?"

"Oh, yes. I do indeed. I think she is just the best woman who ever lived, almost."

"Dear me! *That's* why Lady More likes this girl so much. H'm! I shouldn't have thought her amenable to that sort of thing—I suppose they most of them toady the governor's 'lady.'" Bertie reflected. And he felt the less inclined to take his partner seriously that she seemed so very serious herself.

So he tried a chaffing kind of flirtation such as he had quite the habit of in London drawing-rooms, and found that that had the effect of making her less talkative than ever.

"If all the girls in Bombay are like that it's a bad look-out," said to himself.

He still felt the motion of the ship beneath his feet. The moving punkahs made him feel as if the house itself was swaying from side to side. It was a delightfully lively dance, and the fact that half the men wore uniforms made the scene much more striking than anything but a regimental ball would be in this country.

Later on Lady More said to Herbert, "I hope you liked Rose Bernethy. She really is a very nice girl, though I daresay she's rather shy at first. I don't think she's very happy with her stepmother."

"Well, I confess I didn't get much out of her."

"Ah, but you should try. She's a very well-read girl, and few girls out here ever open a book."

"I hope you didn't tell her I had come out here to write a book," Bertie said, laughing.

After the dance was over Herbert found himself standing near the tall, round-faced aide-de-camp, Mr. Masters, who had come to him on board.

"Well, I think we've had enough of that, don't you?" he said. "I'm good for a smoke now, ain't you?"

In the smoking-room were assembled the other members of Mr. Hardinge's staff, though the governor himself had gone to bed. Vanlennert had been introduced to them all, but not much more than that.

"I'd backed Match-maker for a place as well, so I was seven pounds in whatever happened," was saying, as he entered, a man about thirty-four, already getting bald. He wore no moustache and was entirely clean-shaved, so that he had rather the look of a barrister than an officer. This was Lord William Morthsay, the military secretary.

He spoke with a slight Scottish accent, and in as grave and most pedantic a manner as if the subject under discussion were an affair of state. And the natural gravity of his face, noticeable for its long chin, was in tune with the gravity of his manner. When Bertie came in he made a little movement. "Will you have a peg?" he said, and then he spoke in Hindustanee to a servant who had been standing motionless in the shade.

"You've just missed our races," he said to Bertie.

"Yes, I'm sorry for that. What sort of horses do they run here?"

"Oh, walers—that is to say, the walers generally win. But, of course, you find lots of fellows who swear by Arabs."

"Oh, I don't know about walers always winning, Rothsay, at all," said Wilson-Brook, another aide.

"Walers are horses from New South Wales, I suppose," said Bertie.

"Oh, any Australian horse you call a waler," said Masters.

"Do they break them out there?"

"No. They run perfectly wild there. You can break one for yourself if you like."

"I suppose you saw the last Derby," Lord William said to Bertie.

"No; as a matter of fact, I did not see the Derby this year. I saw the Oaks, but I didn't see the Derby."

"Ah," said Lord William, nodding his head as if to approve Bertie's choice. "Iolanthe was my brother's, Ardreshan's, mare you know."

The other two aides-de-camp seemed likewise to approve Bertie's conduct in going to the Oaks instead of the Derby. "I should like to have seen that. It must have been an exceedingly tight thing."

"Yes, the closest running I ever saw the last hundred yards—except once at Newmarket—and that was a match," said Bertie, sympathetically warming to interest. He went on to describe the race.

"Of course I don't believe a word about May Queen having been pulled. I believe Withers might have got more out of her than he did," he said.

"Let me see, Mann was your—was Ardreshan's mount, wasn't he?" said Wilson-Brook.

"Yes, Mann."

And though all the details of this victory had been discussed twenty times before, they went over the subject again with renewed pleasure, and a certain feeling of cordiality towards the new-comer who had introduced it. And from this they passed to other racing reminiscences and the discussion of horse-flesh, and Bertie was stronger upon this point than upon those connected with any other form of sport.

When he was in bed he determined that he had fallen

among very good fellows and was sure to have a good time here in Bombay.

But then his mind wandered, and one by one the events of the day danced confusedly before him—palm-trees and the white glare of the sun upon the dusty streets, and the throbbing of the steamer and the wild crying of the natives swarming on board, and immeasurable wastes of silent water under the tropic moon, dark figures pacing noiselessly about his chair, and . . .

And vaguely he realised what a strange anti-climax it was to have come all that way to discuss the Oaks and Lord Ardreshan's stables and hunting in the midlands at home.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HERBERT VANLENNERT's prevision of a good time at Government House was altogether realised. He had now been a fortnight in Bombay. There was, he found, any amount of amusement for a person who had leisure for it. He was, naturally enough, well looked upon everywhere. There was a sufficient number and variety of ladies in Bombay to give a thorough and a pleasantly English tone to its society, and to make a man with agreeable manners and adequate looks an acquisition. Though they christened things by queer names here—such as Gymkhana, a word that had not then very long come into use in Anglo-Indian society—the amusements were practically the same as the English ones, only that there was not always the same energy to pursue them; badminton was the only novelty.

True, he was reflecting this moment as he dressed, the riding was rather slow—either out to Mahim Sands or along Sea-Face, neither could be considered ideal rides; when the novelty of them wore off there was no other variety.

And at this point his thoughts took a sudden turn to Lady More. She was a most awful brick certainly—how she took up a chap's interests and identified herself with them! And then he smiled when he remembered how surprised he had been at her recommending Miss Abernethy especially to him the first night he came, and been disposed to put it down to her being flattered by that girl's devotion to herself—whereas . . .

After all, it was a good trait in anyone to appreciate Lady More, and that Rose Abernethy—what a beastly name Rose was! why on earth had they christened her by such a one?—was a thoroughly good lot. “And I suppose she’s not bad-looking,” Bertie said to himself; “everybody talks of her as pretty.”

His servant, who had brushed and put out his breeches, helped him to put them on, and buttoned his gaiters and fixed the spurs on his boots. (It was very jolly having a man once again to do everything for you, as he had had at Netley in old days.) And when all this was completed, the *chota sâb*’s horse was brought round. (Bertie always went in the household by the name of the *chota sâb*, little sâhib, for Sir Hardinge and his staff were all above the medium height.) And he went off to keep his appointment to ride with this same Miss Abernethy.

Her father was a high-court judge. But before this appointment he had had the largest practice at the Bombay bar, and people said that he had saved a hundred thousand pounds in ten years, and he must be saving still. He had married again a young wife, but this was three years ago, and there was no child of this marriage.

“Certainly, she’s wonderfully little spoilt by being run after like that,” Herbert said to himself. This thought was still in his mind as he helped Miss Abernethy onto her horse; her modesty bordered on awkwardness, but then it contrasted so pleasantly with Mrs. Abernethy’s manner that that might be overlooked. She was not the sort of girl who simply fell in love with a red coat—so much Bertie had gathered of her character. But, as he realised with a sort of surprise, how little else.

“I must try and manage to draw her out more this time,” he said to himself. The sort of chaff (capable of merging into tenderness) which was the current form of flirtation had, he found, failed conspicuously with her.

Wherefore, when they were riding together—Mrs. Abernethy had no opinion of Bertie herself, and that made her only the more willing to see him carry off her step-daughter, so she had made an excuse the last moment and left the two young people to themselves—he fell back upon the simplest method possible of direct questions.

“How do you like India as compared to England?” he began, feeling what a foolish question it would have seemed if he had been talking to anyone else.

‘Oh, I was at school in Brighton before I came out. I n’t see very much of England.’

‘But, then, in the holidays.’

‘Oh, I always went to my grandmother in Inverness, except when I went to Norwich.’

‘You have much more fun out here, naturally.’

‘Yes, much more *fun*,’ Miss Abernethy said, in rather a doubtful voice.

Bertie could not help laughing. ‘Don’t you like having fun?’ he asked.

Miss Abernethy coloured vividly under her freckles, and up to the roots of her red hair. ‘Oh, yes,’ she said, as if she had been detected in some fault.

‘“She is a rum girl. How am I to . . .”’

‘There’s one thing very jolly about India: that everybody seems so good-natured and kind, and . . . (What did she mean by looking at me in that quick way?) and society and all that isn’t so stiff as it is in England.’

He paused for a reply, but none came.

‘You seem to make friends with people sooner. Don’t you think so?’

‘You see, I don’t know what society is like in England,’ Miss Abernethy answered.

‘But you mean you don’t altogether like society in Bombay.’

‘Oh, I didn’t mean that,’ said his companion, in a shocked voice.

‘“Then what the *devil* did you mean?” said Bertie to himself, beginning to lose his temper.) “You’re the last person who ought to complain,” he said. “For you’re tremendously popular here, I fancy.” Directly he had said it he was sorry for his impertinence, for once more Miss Abernethy coloured all over.

They were walking their horses now within a palm grove. Had anyone set down there of a sudden might have supposed himself in some quite savage country, say in Africa, so small and mean were the few wooden huts that could be seen now and then among the trees, so wild-looking were the naked children who came out to stare at them from beneath their black and shaggy locks.

‘We shall be at Mahim directly, and then a lot of chaps will come round,’ Vanlennert thought. A sporting instinct made him try and improve the “running.” “Why didn’t I think of this before?” he said to himself, and began—

"Of course, my hosts are so jolly: that's one thing that makes Bombay so pleasant."

"Ah, yes." At any rate, there was more animation in this last speech.

"Lady More's one in a thousand."

"Yes, indeed."

"She thinks a lot of you," he said. For the third time Miss Abernethy blushed, more painfully than before.

"Lady More's so very, very *good*," she said, with emphasis.

"Yes. That's just it," said Bertie. "Lots of people are very jolly and good-natured and that. But with Lady More you feel that it's much more than that, and . . . it isn't because she's stupid; she's uncommonly clever, too, you know."

For once Miss Abernethy seemed to regain her self-possession. A smile swept rapidly over her face. At all events, that was an improvement.

"What are you laughing at?" said Bertie, good-naturedly.

"I wasn't laughing, Mr. Vanlennert;" she looked up almost in horror.

"Smiling, then. Because I talked about anyone being clever, I suppose."

"Oh, no. Why would I smile at that?"

"Because, of course, I'm no judge whether people are clever or not."

"Oh, indeed, Mr. Vanlennert, I didn't think anything like that. . . . If I smiled a little," she went on, hesitatingly, "I think it was just the way you said what you did about Lady More not being stupid, because she . . . was so good."

"Still, that's rather the way with a good many what you call good people . . . that they're rather, in a way . . . don't read books and that sort of thing; don't you think so?" Oddly enough, Bertie found himself put a little out of countenance this time.

"No, indeed, I don't think so at all," said Miss Abernethy, modestly but with conviction.

"Oh," said Bertie, generously, "I'm not against religion or that sort of thing."

He felt the next moment that he had somehow gone back three years at least in age when he made that speech, and he looked to see whether his companion were not laughing again. But Miss Abernethy's head was turned away.

And now they had reached Mahim sands, the great stretch

of grey sea-beach on the northern side of the island. Several smart young cavaliers at once joined their party. Plenty of pleasant chaff went on in the company, but Miss Abernethy was not herself a conspicuous member of it.

It was a week or two after this special ride (one of several) that Herbert Vanlennert was sitting one morning by himself. Well, here he was in this new world, in this mighty empire of ours beyond seas. He could see over the narrow tongue of land on which stood all the public buildings and the European quarter, to the greater bay beyond, a confused archipelago of land and water, mystic and enchanted as a dream.

Here he was in it, but not of it. What part or lot had he in all the life of the place? There was the rub. None, absolutely. It was only a more idle English life into which he had come. Though he knew that some terror lay behind him in the old country, he had no longer any keen dread of it; by force of determining never to let himself think upon it he had nearly forgotten its very nature. What had he done for himself by coming out? Should he have to return as he came—only more displaced than ever? The thought of taking up his duties at Netley as of old sent a shiver through him. Yet now there was nothing left.

Of course he knew well enough what Lady More's scheme for him was; he knew it all the better because Lady More had avoided talking about Miss Abernethy to him. That would be a solution evidently, but it made him think not altogether well of his friend that she should have had no better plan than that—and it made him think still worse of himself. Nevertheless, it was a solution.

And what other was there? One had occurred to him—he might try and practise at the Bombay bar. As a *real* employment this was worse even than the bar at home. But Bertram and his counsels were a good long way off by this time; at all events, money might be made rapidly. Think of old Abernethy making his hundred thousand pounds in ten years. He could go back with that and get the estate all right. At this point came another pang at Bertie's heart. "What a frightfully unlucky beggar I am! I'm hedged in every way," he said to himself.

And he looked out with something almost like envy on the crowds whom he could see down by the sands. Two little objects he could detect running round and round; these were

horses being trained there by native grooms, who held them by ropes. There were multitudes of bathers and people selling palm-juice. And he could see a train moving along the line of the Hindu Suttee ground, and could hear faintly the confused hubbub and hum from a great multitude—part of an illimitable world in which he had no part or lot.

"She's not half a bad girl," was his inconsequent reflection in answer to this appealing voice, "and I certainly get on as well with her as anybody else does—of course, the little *padre* doesn't count, and if 'Aunt Lizzie'" (so he had begun to call Lady More sometimes) "thinks it's the right thing for me to do. . ."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"THIS is something like. By Jove, Bombay is just like England," Bertie thought, as he sat among a company of young officers at Humayûnabâd in Central India. He had been dining at the mess of the seventy-fifth Bombay Lancers. He was himself the guest of General Hotchkins who commanded the station. There was more freedom and *laissez aller* here than among Sir Hardinge's staff, where even social duties and betting on the races were undertaken and discharged in a conscientious spirit. The responsibilities of life had begun to press upon him; but here he was in a company of men who all, young and old, let the to-morrow take care of itself. To-morrow Bertie was going to join a shooting party in camp twenty miles off. He had been initiated into the mysteries of polo at Bombay, and this morning he had taken part in a scratch match. He felt nobly tired and a little stiff, almost nodding off at times, but with the doctor's voice and Spendler's banjo sounding pleasantly in his ear.

The man he liked best of the crowd was Captain Jerningham, the general's aide, who had come with him to the dinner. They had known each other at Eton—though Vanlennert was a year or two the younger—and they became friends at once on the strength of this. The little captain was to take Bertie out to camp the next day.

"He's awfully like what I was myself a couple of years ago," Bertie thought that night. It was just two years since he had seen Silvia. "What a miserable beggar I've been since

then, and what miserable luck I've had," he went on, but without any keen emphasis. For fatigue and the wine that he had drunk, and the talk and singing of the evening made a confusion in his head, through which all sorts of visions of the past went by dimly.

His boy, the grey-bearded Mahmood Khan, came to bring him his *chota hazari*. "Captain sâb says, breakfast nine o'clock, sâb, he start nine . . . nine." Mahmood came to a sudden stop, as if quite satisfied.

"Nine-thirty, I suppose," Vanlennert reflected.

Captain Jerningham was going to drive his own cart. But it had had a pole put in in place of the shafts and so been converted into a sort of curricule or high-wheeled *tam-tam*. They had jobbed horses for the first two-thirds of the way, and Jerningham's groom was to meet them at Bandwara with a couple of his own ponies. For the aide-de-camp had already been in camp and had come back to Humayûnabâd to receive his chief's guest.

The two stout little ponies cantered through the dust, making no noise. Trees like ash-trees bordered the road, or alternated with others (they were mangoes) more like English oaks, which spread a sharp-lined, heavy shadow. Now they approached a darker corner, above which a bullock was walking down an inclined plane till he dragged up a huge water-skin which overflowed with bright splashings into a trough; and just as they passed, Bertie caught a momentary glimpse of black faces half shrouded by veils of dusky red and of bare brown legs with silver anklets. The dark figures carried brass pots upon their heads, and these shone like stars.

They overtook another dog-cart in which were two of their hosts of the previous night, and the two carts had a race; and from a little village with tiled roofs some naked, dark-brown boys came out to look at them. Then the other cart turned off a different route and they slackened their pace.

The irregular pointed roof of a temple held its flag sideways above the thick pipal-tree which grew out of its court. The sacred pipal-tree has leaves like the leaves of a poplar, which keep up a continual whispering. A row of monkeys sat upon the temple wall. All was dust, confusion, and decay. But in India the dust has a voice of its own, and decay is more steady than growth.

"Now," thought Bertie once again, "I am in the real India."

It was wonderful to see their shadow running before them on the white road: more wonderful to see the string of camels that they passed. With a sharp scream, not unlike the screaming of swifts, only louder, a flight of green parrots went by. On every side the wide plain was studded with fine trees which shut in the view and made the landscape look not unlike some huge English park. Towards the horizon, on their right, the land rose to hills, not very high, with pink and purple crags and clefts.

If you raised your eyes there was the perpetual glare of the white sky and the sunlight in which the tree-tops seemed to dissolve as into a mist. And ever above the trees the kites and vultures poised and hovered, turning in ceaseless revolutions.

By tiffin time they got to their last stage, where Captain Jerningham's syce was waiting with his two horses. Bertie's servant got out their lunch-basket, and they had lunch. Some village boys came and asked for baksheesh and swung themselves upon the trees like monkeys.

"Would you like to take a turn now?" said Captain Jerningham.

"Very well, yes I should," said Vanlennert, and got up into his place. Then going round to the left-hand side of the dog-cart the syce left the horses' heads and joined Mahmood Khan at the back.

"Half a second," said Captain Jerningham, who was just lighting his cigar. "All right."

There ran from behind the trap the bent figure of an old man who looked like a fakir. Bertie, who was just settling himself in his seat, and the reins in his hands, noted the curious effect of his bristly white beard against the dark skin. The blackness of the skin itself was overspread with a sort of greyness produced partly by age, partly, perhaps, by dust. He wore nothing but a dirty white cloth round his loins.

The man ran and hobbled past him in a second and round by the head of the horses.

"Confound you," Bertie cried to the old man. "*Hat jao*, get out of the light—*cupboard*—what is it?"

"*Khabad dar!*" roared Captain Jerningham.

"*Khabad dar*, you damned old fool," said Bertie, for the man did not appear on the other side. Then he pulled his horses violently to the right, and as he did this his heart gave one tremendous throb. There was no old man to be seen.

Herbert Vanlennert could not help it ; he felt that his cheeks had turned pale. He looked at his companion sitting square and alert with the huge cigar in his mouth. Jerningham's prominent eyes were as two spheres, but his face gave no other sign of astonishment.

"Did you see that?" said Herbert. He was driving on now, and had waited till he could steady his voice. But he still spoke with a slight nasal twang.

"Yes," answered the other, with a nod, without removing his cigar.

"What does it mean?"

"Can't say. I heard of another chap seeing the same sort of thing."

"How do you mean? What did he see?"

"Saw a chap—a native—appear like that and never saw him again."

"What did he think it was—a ghost?"

"No, I don't know. He didn't know what it was. That's what he saw—just what we did."

As Vanlennert looked at the unmoved face of his companion, with his cigar almost as large as himself, and felt the contrast between that sight and the strangest experience of all his life, the whole thing came upon him in an aspect so comic that he burst into a laugh.

"Well," he said, with the tears still in his eyes, "you take it as if it were a matter of course."

Captain Jerningham took his cigar out of his mouth and laughed quietly too.

"Take anything as a matter of course here," he said. "Rum place, India: can't pretend to make it all out."

Afterwards Bertie often meditated that philosophic phrase of the little captain. "Rum place, can't pretend to make it all out," and the vision he had at that moment of his comrade quietly puffing at his big cheroot. He liked Captain Jerningham better than ever after that.

It was about five o'clock when they drove into Magaon Sandri.

"That's where we stop; that place built on a slab," said Jerningham, and before he got down he called to a tall man in a solar-topi sitting in the verandah, "Hallo, major, did you get down yesterday all right? Had any sport?"

Another man came out at the sound of the wheels and

noded to Jerningham, "Here you are, Bandy," as he puffed his cigarette. Then they both got down and Bertie was introduced to the two officers, and almost immediately a discussion on the sport of the day began.

"Well," said Jerningham to the shorter and younger man, "did you try my sixteen-bore? How did it shoot?"

"Who's here now? is Fairbrother out to-day?"

"Yes, he and Roberts have gone farther out, near Berham-pore."

"Where's that?"

"It's about fourteen miles off, just the other end of the jhil."

"Shall you be able to stay down any time, Mr. Vanlennert?" said Major Ratcliffe, the tall man.

"Oh, I hope so, as long as Captain Jerningham or General Hotchkins stay, I suppose."

"That's capital. We've had some very fair shooting. Of course, we don't go in for big bags, such as you get in a drive in England."

"What sort of birds do you get—chiefly duck?"

"Yes, duck chiefly. We've had some partridges."

"The general said he was going to bring a duck punt, didn't he?" said Herbert to Captain Jerningham.

"Yes. That's what one wants," said Captain O'Maley, the other captain, "and a duck-gun. I'd only got a twelve-bore till Jerningham here lent me his gun."

"Ah, mine's only a twelve-bore. What kind of duck are they?"

"Oh, brown-backs, mallards. I killed a splendid mallard yesterday. It scaled just over three pounds. But have you ordered tea, Ratcliffe?"

"Yes."

"By the way," said O'Maley to Jerningham, "was old Cunningham here when you left?"

"Here's the tea," said Major Ratcliffe, and he called out in Hindustani to the servant, who brought a table from the inside to the verandah.

"Oh, rather. Why, it was the night before I left that he told us the story about the shoot at Pachmaree."

"He'll be back soon, I expect. You'll have the opportunity of meeting a regular typical *shikari*," Ratcliffe said to Herbert.

"Oh, a regular tiger-story man do you mean?"

"Ra-ther," said O'Maley.

"But he is an awfully good *shikari* all the same," said Jerningham.

"Oh, rather. As good a fellow as ever stepped, too."

"Oh, yes. I like old Cunningham."

And with a general chorus of agreement they settled down to their tea.

"And teal; you get teal, too?" said O'Maley to Herbert, continuing a conversation which had been broken off a few minutes earlier.

"Do you get quail?"

"Not now. In the rains you do like anything. And florican. This is an awfully good country for florican. They're a sort of—well, I believe they're rather like capercailzie. Oh, here you are, Cunningham."

"Yes, here I am," said a huge, black-bearded, broad-shouldered man, rather fat, who was running down with sweat. "What did you say was like capercailzie?"

"Florican."

"Will you have some tea, Cunningham?" said Major Ratcliffe.

"No, they're not. Tea, no. I suppose you've got some beer. If not, I'll have a peg."

"Let me introduce you to Mr. Vanlennert, who's staying with General Hotchkins."

"How do you do, sir. Is the general coming over?"

"He hopes to to-morrow or next day."

"You were asking what florican were," said Mr. Cunningham to Bertie. "They're a sort of bustard. The natives call them grass-peacock; but that's only one of their idiotic names."

And so the conversation went on. The other members of the party came in. Each spoke about his bag, and that prevented the company from ever wandering away from the subject of sport. But though the talk was monotonous, there reigned throughout such a sense of good fellowship and of good breeding that the society was always agreeable.

They dined together in the rest-house, and after dinner sat out upon the verandah. Bertie found himself next Major Ratcliffe, the artillery officer. He was a very fine specimen of his class, over six feet in height, strongly built, a well-read man, too, and keen about his profession. Cunningham bore the chief burden of the talk. They were now on the calibre of different kinds of guns, and he had "shikaried" in many coun-

tries, and had unknown and inexhaustible mines of experience to draw upon.

"Well," he was saying in his loud voice, "all I know is, I got four rhinos with my Winchester, and got four shots at a rhino with an express and didn't kill him."

"You may have been a bit off colour."

"Bosh! man. It was the same day."

"How many grains of powder did you have in a charge?"

"Ninety about, for all I can remember."

"That's about right," said Fairbrother.

"It's rum though," said a young man, Haverfield by name, sitting next Ratcliffe; "how one does vary in one's shooting. And how men vary with the rifle."

"Firing at a mark, what's the good of that?" said Cunningham. "It don't teach men to judge distances. And that's the real difficulty."

"But what would you have?" said O'Maley. "You must have something."

"I'd let 'em all go out and *shikar*," said Cunningham, and gave a great laugh in his beard.

"I thought the officers judged the distances," said Herbert, "and they do *shikar*, as you call it."

"Yes, that's true," answered Ratcliffe. "But there's nothing so hard. The least bit of rise or fall in the ground makes all the difference."

"By all the accounts I've ever read—I don't know whether you can rely on them—there must be awfully few soldiers who fire straight or anything like it in action," Vanlennert said.

"Oh, very few. They get blown or excited, and they're all over the place," said Haverfield. "At Maiwand it was awful in that way. And look at those fellows in Africa."

"Were you at Maiwand?" asked Bertie, in some surprise; the speaker looked such a mere boy.

"Oh, well, I expect those fellahin, or whatever they're called, are just like a lot of Bengalees would be in action. By Jove! what will old Gladstone do now? Give way, I suppose!" And the talk rushed off upon the quite recent news of the defeat of Hicks Pasha.

But Major Ratcliffe brought it back at last to one of his favourite subjects, shooting and firing tactics.

"Even if men fired like machines," he said to Herbert, "they couldn't fire mathematically right. Well, to begin with,

you'd have to change the elevation a little bit after each shot on account of the expansion of the metal."

"Of the bullet, do you mean?"

"No, I mean of the gun-barrel. You see," he went on to explain more fully, "the bullet we'll say fits into the barrel like that,"—and he made a bunch with five fingers of his right hand and passed them within a circle formed by the thumb and forefinger of the other hand,—“the heat expands the barrel so,”—and he enlarged the circle a little,—“and the shot has to be expanded to fit it,”—and he expanded his bunch of fingers. “But that means an expenditure of force, and, besides that, the bullet, you know, has a larger section and so meets with more resistance from the air, so it has less velocity and falls a little bit sooner. So, suppose an officer tells his men to put the back sight up to eight hundred yards, that may be good enough if the barrel is cool, and not if it's hot.”

“Still, that's one of the things you could correct with mechanical soldiers.”

“Yes, of course; I was not discussing that. Of course, the great thing which makes men fire badly is excitement—or funk, if you like to call it.”

“That's just what I say,” said Cunningham, who had come to the end of a long story. “There's nothing but practice.”

“Then I suppose,” said Vanlennert to Ratcliffe, “you really don't get much good except from the regular good shots—the marksmen.”

“Well, that depends——” the other was beginning.

“Still, I should have thought,” Herbert went on, continuing his reflections, “that you might strike an average; that it would be better to do that than expect very good firing from one or two.”

“Yes; you're quite right about that in my opinion,” Ratcliffe said. “That's just what I think ought to be done. What with the ricochets and everything there's a good deal of ground which is pretty dangerous to go on; and if officers just made up their minds only to get certain spaces of ground covered in that way I believe firing tactics might be made much more useful. And manœuvring to get out of fire ought to be done on the same lines. . . . There's another thing,” he went on, after a pause, “which ought to be done, and that is to have all arms of the same calibre—rifles and carbines alike. So that if the cavalry got away from their own ammunition waggons and near those of the infantry they could reload from them.”

"You're quite right about that," said Captain Jerningham, who had strolled up. "I say, Vanlennert, I think I shall turn into our tent," and he gave a glance round towards Cunningham, who was telling another story to Fairbrother and Colonel Sharpe.

"And the machine-guns, too. . . . Good-night," said Major Ratcliffe, shaking hands.

"Come into our tent, O'Maley," Jerningham said. The four young men, Vanlennert, Jerningham, O'Maley, and Haverfield were together in the tent. Jerningham tuned up his banjo and gave some songs. One or two other men of the party strolled in, others had gone to bed.

Then this party, too, diminished, till only Herbert and the little aide-de-camp were left.

The lamp cast strange shadows around, and the upper part of the tent was almost lost in darkness. A native came into the tent salaaming. All of a sudden the mystery of the East seemed to have invaded their company. The man handed some papers to Captain Jerningham. He spoke in Hindustani.

"Damn it. I'm sorry to say I shall have to go back to Humayûnabâd, and the general's not coming to-morrow. He's sent word to say, though, that the Sixth Dragoons, who are at Bhusapore, have invited him over to a pig-sticking, and he'll bring a mount in case you like to go——"

"Oh, rather."

"Well, look here. Why shouldn't you have my little Arab?"

"Oh, that's awfully kind."

"He's a beggar for pig-sticking. He puts down his head and follows by scent."

"By scent, oh, rot. You're pulling my leg."

"No; I swear it's true. I never saw a horse who did that before; but he does; you'll see. You've got to stick on like wax."

"Oh, yes. That's all right. I'm much obliged. I should enjoy it no end."

"Oh, it's the best thing going. Here are some letters and things which have come for you."

Bertie took them mechanically, and began to read a letter of Molly's in the same way. But almost directly his attention was caught by a name, and his heart stopped beating.

"We have just heard the sad news that poor Silvia Tennant (Lady Panton) is dead. She had had a baby. Isn't it dread-

fully sad? When one thinks how beautiful and handsome she was. . . ."

"My God!" he exclaimed with a groan.

Captain Jerningham turned round suddenly. He took his feet off the arms of his chair and let them fall to the ground.

"*Acha, jao*," he said to the native, who salaamed and disappeared.

Then he shut his novel and threw away his cigarette—all from an instinctive courtesy. And, for the same reason, he held his peace, and made no movement to show that he was looking at his companion.

Bertie's head was turned towards the entrance of the tent. He saw without seeing the man disappear behind it. Large drops gathered in his eyes and would have fallen, but that he got up and walked straight forth through the outer canvas into the full night.

"I see thy gentle moonlight face,
Thy thrilling voice I hear."

Those lines from somewhere, an immense way off, came unbidden into Bertie's mind like echoes heard at night over an infinite waste of water.

There had been a time, ages ago, when he had known a lot of poetry much better than this. And yet these two lines and no others came back again and again.

"Thy gentle moonlight face,
Thy thrilling voice I hear."

He looked upward to the heavens, whence the incalculable stars shone down with an obtrusive brightness which seemed to speak. On every side, one by one, not in serried ranks, the huge masses of foliage slept beneath them, and it was as if an immeasurable silent murmur filled the air born of vast distances and an immemorial past.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"ONE—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight." Maynard counted the strokes of the clock as he lay in his bed and looked at the round circle of light upon the ceiling. How quiet everything was! How did he come to be lying there with only one shaded candle to light the room? Somebody

was sitting between his bed and the table, reading. It was Kitty. How did she come to be there?

Then, beyond the circle of light, he knew there was that *thing* hanging from the curtain-pole. Should he look at it or not? Why not? It was an empty bird-cage. What more natural in the world? The fire-light caught it and it cast a shadow just through the division of the curtains, high up, upon the top of the blind. What was there in that? Yet something whispered to him not to look too long.

He turned his gaze to the candle. "That's just what I like," he said to himself, "a single shaded candle—so much more homely and comfortable than gas. How big Kitty's shadow looks against the wall! What a cosy look there is about that red check table-cloth and the square-backed chairs and the cane easy-chair, whose shadow makes such huge round eyes against the wall."

Everything was most delightfully quiet: Kitty read on without moving, and he could hear the talking of the flames in the fire along-side his bed-head. The fire-light fought with the light of the candle: across the other's shadows it drew bands of light: and now these grew together and flared into such brightness that the darkness melted quite away: the white jet of gas went hissing from the coals behind him; in a moment this new energy died again. The shadow of the cane-chair came out as before. Maynard felt, somehow, that he was being drawn into the contest of the candle-light and the fire-light, lifted out of himself; it was ecstatic to feel so disembodied that he made a part of everything.

Now the shadows had darkened with dull red stains across them. In that dark corner stood the wash-hand-basin, and that was the water bottle close beside it. A tiny point of light shone out of the corner. Maynard called upon his imagination to change that point of light from its real self into something fantastic. And now it seemed to be a lamp over a wet street, and then the light became a huge star—the Star of Bethlehem—shining afar over a desert. "A star upon the Eastern Road," he said to himself, trying to remember some lines he had been made to learn at school, and thinking how that star of Bethlehem used to excite his imagination in his childhood days.

But all the while an inner voice said, "Better not look at the dressing-table, because above it hangs that cage—that what?" He would not say, even to himself.

There was a piece of sweating on the candle: would it drop or would it not? Everything hung upon that. If Kitty would *only* look up in time to stop it! But something held him back from calling to her and telling her. That something was his reason, still battling against the approach of delirium. Ah! now, now, now: it had dropped. At that signal the shadow of the round table on the ground, of the chair-backs on the wall—that one that was all eyes too—came stealing, stealing towards him. But still the nameless something held its hand upon his lips and forbade him to call out. With an effort he over-mastered his fancies. After all they *were* only chair-backs. And then, in bravado, he looked at the curtain-pole. That was only a——

Ah! At that moment it changed. He knew it would. It turned into that gory head mowing at him, mocking him. Drip—drip—how regularly the blood fell! Ah—h! drip—drip—drip! In thought he stretched out vain hands to Kitty who sat there reading so quietly. Yet she too was in it, she too, without knowing it, was being carried away, away, away on the wings of time. . . .

A clangour of bells broke upon his ear. How curious that he should have fancied he was ill; when here he was standing upon Danebury Hill above his home, looking out eastward to where the Tamar emptied itself into the sea. Over that estuary, between the two hills, hung a golden summer haze pierced now and again by black specks, where seagulls, sailing in landward, passed between him and the sunlight.

He had been wont by times to play the truant when a boy, to walk up to the top of Danebury Hill instead of going to morning church. That was why these bells had a warning sound. And why was it so dark? Still more, why was his mother sitting there so quietly reading by a candle—in her white cap? How long it seemed since he had seen her. And she had put him to bed because—he was ill: no, because he would not go to church. Why the bells were ringing still! He must get up, he must go to church. If he could only make her hear! But she was growing bigger and bigger, and that head which hung upon the curtain-pole, drip, drip, still the blood dropped from it. Clang, clang went the bells. Everything depended upon that. Only deeper and deeper the shadows closed round him and he sank into blank unconsciousness.

He awoke bathed in sweat. Still the bells were ringing—the bells in truth of the Roman Catholic Church on Brook Green half a mile from his house: for it was Christmas Eve. Once more a clock struck—once more he counted the strokes. In what previous stage of existence had he done the same? And Kitty? and the swealings? What a curious dream he had had—long ago—as if all that was passing now had happened long before; but all made fantastic, whereas now it was perfectly reasonable and simple. Here he was lying in bed with Kitty reading a book near him. “What more natural and simple than that?” He said this to himself with a sort of angry insistence, as if somebody else were there doubting and denying that it was so simple and natural. He had been ill, no doubt, and in bed a day or two. Well, there was nothing extraordinary in that. He was all right now: presently he should get up. If it wasn’t perfectly natural would Kitty be reading there so quietly? And he urged this on the imaginary objector with a sort of appeal. Kitty looked up at that moment, caught his eye, and smiled. Then she came forward to give him some medicine. “You see,” he said to the objector, “how perfectly natural it all is.”

Only what was that sensation at the back of all that something was *coming*! If only those bells would cease he might be able to reason the matter out. And he heard footsteps approaching along the pavement—for his hearing was abnormally acute. Step, step they came up to the front door. No, it had passed: that was not his footstep. Whose? Somebody’s, who was coming, coming, coming. Try what he would he could not remember who or what. The roar outside, was it merely the sound of a cart or was it the waves of the sea? For he had been away somewhere by the sea—no, on Danebury Hill—and seen his mother. “Yes,” Maynard said, “and all the time I was expecting some one or something coming, coming, coming, coming. What was it? What did I mean? But I think so still: I know it. And I am wide awake now. That roar of the waves was all nonsense. But it isn’t nonsense about this something, which is coming, coming, coming. Kitty is in it too. And yet she isn’t: that is why she sits there reading so quietly. Oh, my God!” he cried, with a sudden inspiration, while his heart gave a bound strong enough almost to break its slender shell, “I know what is coming. It is Death! And Kitty sits there reading, reading. And Death, Death, itself, is coming outside the door. If she *could* but know.”

Kitty sat there reading; she could have touched the bed. But she did not look at it—not at the head, that is: she kept her head upon her hand so that she could by looking up see most of the bed, could see the outline of her father's figure, but not his face. And she too kept on saying to herself that all this was perfectly natural—her father had had many bouts of illness lately. He would be up again in a day or two after this attack, as after the previous ones.

But all the while a horrible apprehension and a still more horrible remorse was gnawing at her soul. Looking back, she saw how different her father had been for the last half year and more—even before Bertie had gone away in fact (for unconsciously Kitty still dated everything by Bertie: though she thought that she never thought of him now). How different he had been these last six months, how much more gentle and kind! Why hadn't she noticed it before? A text out of those Bible readings to which Mrs. Maynard subjected all the family rang in her ears. "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." It was Kitty's wonderful faculty that things which did not interest her made no entry at all into her mind, and that was the case now with all her mother's Bible teaching: so that she had no idea to what this text referred. But the music of it had struck upon her ear and she now retained it.

"If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace."

A coal fell out of the fire and struck against the shovel. The room was so still that even this sound made her start. "In a minute," she thought, "I must turn and look—what shall I see?" She did turn and look, and saw only her father's large eyes looking at her sadly, appealingly. But, in spite of remorse, Kitty felt her capital of love terribly small, and was still afraid of a call upon it which she could not meet. So she only smiled and nodded her head and brought him his medicine. After all, there was nothing very terrible in lying there ill: she had done the same when she was a little girl and rather liked it. She in her turn resolutely refused to see anything out of the common.

Only when she turned back to her book all the horror of the stillness came again. It was as if the air swayed to and fro under the action of some tide. Why did the idea force itself upon her that she was left alone with a man near his end? A

man: yes, but her father. And Kitty forced herself to remember the times that his companionship (though it had not touched her heart very much) had been a cheery protection against her mother's strict rules, against troublesome "oughts," and dreary views of life. And though without again looking at his face she turned her chair a little round so that she was almost touching the bed.

And *she*? Oh, couldn't *she* help—she whom he had looked upon as a sort of protecting divinity? If she could only know, only be told.

If she *could* but know! And Bertram, who had been there only that afternoon, if he could know surely *he* could help. Or that man whose footsteps he could still hear, couldn't he help? Was he obliged to go farther and farther down the street? Or was it just *frightful* selfishness? Oh God, his footsteps would die away altogether in a minute, in a minute.

"A wintry night and there's snow on the mountain-tops," Kitty heard her father murmur at this point. .

Crash! Was there an awful sound or was there none? No, Kitty—his mother—had not heard—and yet—was he being moved? Why couldn't he tell? Why would not some one come and stop it? Nobody, nobody was trying to help him. Ah! What an agony of pain! And he could not cry; he could not articulate; his throat was full and gurgling. It *had*—it was—it *had* come, then!

Then of a sudden all the horror faded. The light receded and receded. The candle itself has grown a point. Was it a candle? Was there anything? Then from some far depths of his consciousness came voices, as searching and pathetic as the voices of a cathedral choir in dim twilight. Another being, not he, perceived that Kitty was before him, that she held his hand and kissed it, and then looked at him with wide eyes of terror and then started back. All this was receding and receding. He tried to respond. For a moment he knew that another being, not he, held Kitty's hand in its own. But the sensation grew dim and dimmer. . . .

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE great silence of the morning heat lay stretched like a blanket over the earth; and the group of four horsemen, who had found a little shade beneath some mimosa-trees felt its influence and spoke only now and then.

"Be quiet, you brute." "What's the name of your shikari?" Chunder Ram." "Oh," dropped now and again upon the alpitating air. The boar-spears of the little company, with steel points that caught from time to time a ray of the sun, might have served to suggest an ambush of troopers, say in the days of our great civil wars. Hornets buzzed about the horses, two syces were talking together in guttural tones ten yards off. And the thousandfold activities of nature transacted themselves as they were wont.

"Look, there goes a fox," said General Hotchkins to Herbert Vanlennert, who only nodded; he was the most silent of all. But everything he saw seemed burnt into his memory. He watched the tiny Indian fox steal away towards the bed of the river which lay out of sight. A geir-falcon stooped to a bush not far off—but too late; the grey partridge made off with a flutter of wings. And now two jackals emerged from the jungle.

"That's what we call dâk jungle," General Hotchkins explained.

"I see," replied Bertie, in as lively a tone as he could command.

But with another self he was still living through the unforgettable moments that he had passed last night under the countless stars. They were not moments of thought, and yet they seemed to have changed his whole existence. So keen had been the onslaught of memory that it now seemed to him as if he had actually seen Silvia during those silent minutes. His own self he saw now as he was in those by-gone chivalrous days. Only two years ago! Was it possible? And now other visions forced themselves upon him—Beatrice Kirtle—Miss Bernethy: he had entertained the thought of marrying her—who had known a Silvia Tennant! Ah!

"Ah!" breathed likewise from General Hotchkins. But that was a sigh of satisfaction. And another officer said,

"There they are!" Bertie, recalled to himself, looked up suddenly. The night and all its stars disappeared, and he was on the commonplace earth again.

A great but distant murmur filled the air. When Herbert became conscious of it he knew that it had been in his ears sometime. It might have been taken for the noise of a city in revolt, but afar off. Was it some village? And what were they shouting about?

The sound grew more distinct. The natives of the jungle seemed to be aware of it.

An antelope—a black buck—bounded from among the camel bushes, which marked the end of the cultivated soil, and his family followed at his heels.

"Hullo!" "Ah! There they go," came from the party beneath the trees. A group of spotted deer came out creepingly. Then seeing the horsemen they galloped away to the right.

"What is it?" Vanlennert asked.

"Those—oh, those are spotted deer," said one of the officers of the Carbineers.

"I meant that row: don't you hear?"

"Oh, why those are the beaters. They're beating this way. He'll be out in a minute, I expect."

"Oh, I see," said Herbert, surprised, and again sank into melancholy recollections. The scene had a faint and sad suggestion of a certain meet at Netley—it must have been almost exactly two years ago, just before he sold poor old Stampede. The excitement of the hunt, he remembered, had made him forget Silvia for a time, and he recognized the same feeling now. But his thoughts were so sad that the tightening of the pulse, which he could not but feel, came to him as a sort of foreboding. General Hotchkins looked at him askance, not sure whether he was not funkng.

The big Major Ratcliffe was of their party. But he had appeared to Herbert so odd this morning that he could hardly believe he was the same man. He had been very talkative at first, as he and Bertie rode to the meet side by side; but he said things merely for the sake of speaking and scarcely listened for the answers. Then he was more silent than anybody. Now he suddenly became communicative once more.

"Of course," he now said to Vanlennert, "if he breaks near either of the other sets he's their pig and we can't cut in. . . . I'm rather too heavy for my mount, that's the worst of it," he

went on, "if he breaks pretty near this way it'll be all right, especially if it's on that side, because he's pretty sure to run——"

"Hush!" exclaimed General Hotchkins.

"I say we'd better not make any row now," said Captain Childers of the dragoons, in low tones.

"Damnation," the general said, suddenly, then turning round he spoke some words of Hindustani to the syces; and one of them ran up.

Herbert had no time to see what was the matter; for at that moment Captain Childers called out, "There he goes! He's our pig!" and set off at full gallop. Bertie and the major followed at once. As Captain Jerningham had prophesied, his chestnut Arab put his head to the ground and seemed to gallop recklessly forward. In a moment Herbert was in the midst of dry jungle grass almost as strong as osiers and higher than his head. He could see the helmets of the other two men in front of him. It was impossible to see what sort of ground they were going over. The Arab darted forward, then turned suddenly to the left: at one moment he gathered his legs under him for a jump, the next he was stretching at full gallop; and Bertie, judging that the beast knew more of the hunt than he did, let him go.

Suddenly they came to the steep bank of a river. Bertie had time to see Captain Childers's mount come down upon its knees, and his rider disappear over his head. The descent of his own horse was so sudden that he was almost jerked forward on its neck. The beast was swimming the stream, and Herbert raised his feet to the saddle-flaps. And now, he had reached the farther side, and thought he could see, by the movement of the grass in front of him, where the boar was running. His horse galloped this way and that with sudden swerves which almost unseated him. They had now turned quite back in the direction of the river once more, and there was the major who somehow was now ahead of him. The next moment, to Vanlennert's joy, they emerged into the open. The pig was not twenty yards off, but Major Ratcliffe was a good ten yards nearer than he, and in spite of what he had said he seemed to be magnificently mounted. To Bertie's surprise he appeared to be pulling at his horse. And in one minute more Vanlennert had shot past him.

"By Jove. This is worth living for," Herbert said to himself. His Arab thundered along. The pig was now almost be-

neath his feet, and he prepared his spear, holding it as the general had shown him how to hold it that morning. Hr-r-ush! It seemed to run along the back of the boar, before it entered the flesh just above the shoulder. But in trying to pull it out Bertie was jerked forward and the spear-head broke off. The next moment he felt a frightful jar beneath his right foot. The boar had turned and run past. His horse swung round. One leg was so numbed that he could hardly feel the stirrup. But before he had ridden ten yards, Captain Childers, who was only a little way to the rear, had in his turn struck the boar, who rolled over dead. Major Ratcliffe was a few yards behind Captain Childers. "How on earth did he get left like that?" Bertie said to himself.

Almost directly after the general rode up. He was so good-natured that he forgot his own bad luck, in his stirrup-leather giving way at the wrong moment, to congratulate his guest.

"You got first spear, Mr. Vanlennert," he said, red and beaming.

"Yes. But, confound it, I've broken my spear," said Bertie.

"Oh, that's nothing, plenty more," said Captain Childers. "Didn't he touch you though? I was in a funk when I saw him run back. He ran right back, sir," he said to General Hotchkins.

"Yes. He did touch me, I fancy. I've got a most tremendous jar in the right leg."

"Are you sure you've not got a hole in it," said the general, riding round to Bertie's other side.

"No. It's all right?" Herbert took his leg out of the stirrup and shook it. "It's not so numb now."

"Let's look at your stirrup," said Captain Childers, who had dismounted. "By Jingo, the beggar hit his stirrup," he said; "you can see the mark of his tusser against the iron. Look, sir!" and he held the stirrup up for the general to see. "He's had rather a near shave, hasn't he, sir?"

"Let's see," said Major Ratcliffe, who had also dismounted. It was the first time he had spoken. Captain Childers left the stirrup in his hand.

But that was the end of Herbert's hunting for that day. His instep began to inflame a little, and it was painful to keep it in the stirrup; so, as he did not wish to inconvenience the others, he drove back to camp.

When he got to the rest-house, Colonel Sharpe, who had been the organizer of the encampment, met him and said,—

"Oh, Mr. Vanlennert, I didn't know you expected to be back so soon. The fact is, I took the liberty of putting a man into your tent—he turned up suddenly—Rood his name is."

"What, the Devil—is he here?" said Fairbrother, the civilian, who had only just come in.

"Yes. He's called the Devil sometimes," Sharpe went on to explain. "He's a very ugly chap and most infernally clever."

"Oh, well, I like people who are infernally clever," said Herbert, who sometimes now regretted his old associates of the *Piccadilly*. (He still contributed to it from time to time. In India Vanlennert passed for "a regular literary chap, you know." "But an awfully good fellow at that," his friends used to add, knowing the prejudice which the former description would raise—"a gentleman and all that, you know: cousin or something of Lady More.")

"Well, Rood's clever enough for anybody, and ugly enough for two people."

"Bit of the tar brush, isn't there?" said Fairbrother.

"Oh, no, not a bit," said Colonel Sharpe, decisively.

"I always thought there was a bit of *chi-chi* in his talk along with the paddy."

"Oh, no, nothing of the sort. He's Irish," he went on to explain to Herbert. "He talks Hindustani like a native, but he's not a bit of Eurasian blood. He's in the Forests, and the fact is we've taken the rest-house they use here. So I thought, as Jerningham was off, and said you wouldn't be back to-night, I might stick Rood in your tent. But, of course, if——"

"Oh, well, it's all right. I shall be very glad to know him," said Herbert.

Several more men dropped in at the rest-house (it was an ancient forgotten tomb) in the course of the next half-hour; and it was curious how nearly all of them appeared to take a lazy interest in the man Rood, as in somebody quite abnormal. Their interest seemed to have in it a grain of contempt, or at least of patronage; but that was sufficiently accounted for—Herbert had learnt enough of Anglo-Indian society to know this much—by the fact that he was only a Coopers-hill man. Some hints were given which implied that, in spite of his ugliness, Rood was rather notorious for adventures in affairs called of the heart; that he had once narrowly escaped dismissal from the service by reason of the scandal arising from one of these. There was supposed to be another on foot at the present time which kept him glued to the district of Humayûnabâd.

And from this point the speaker launched off to ask Bertie how long he had stayed at that place. And presently Fairbrother whispered to him,—

“We’re not speaking of the devil at this moment, as it happens; but here he is. How are you Rood?” he said, aloud.

“Oh, how are ye? How are ye, colonel? I beg your pardon. I’m sure,” he said to Bertie, for he had nearly tumbled over his feet. The new-comer was so sunburnt that he looked almost like a native, at any rate when he first came in, with his back to the glaring light. He had a short body, long arms and legs, very large ears, and a curiously wrinkled forehead. All these things made him look rather simian. But the bigness of his nose did not suit with that impression. The head spread out widely behind the forehead. His hair was only of a dusky brown, his eyes were black and very small.

Bertie was introduced to him and they shook hands. “I’m sure I hope I didn’t hurt you,” he said again.

“Oh, not in the least.”

“I was trying to tell Mr. Vanlennert,” said Colonel Sharpe, “what there was to see at Humayûnabâd.”

“Oh, there’s not much. Ye might see it in a day,” said Rood. “If you’d like to come back with me, Mr. Vanlennert, the day after to-morrow—there’s just a tomb and an old mosque and one or two things like that.”

“Yes; that tomb’s the only thing I’ve seen,” said Bertie.

“Oh, ye *have* been there then?”

“That’s where they killed that chap, wasn’t it, the old king or whatever he was?” said Captain O’Maley.

“No. What old king?”

“Why that chap the sepoy set up—in the mutiny, don’t you know?”

“Do ye mean Bahadar Shah?” said Rood. “Why that was at Delhi! They took—he wasn’t killed at all. Oh, I see what you’re thinking of,” and Rood seemed to find that in the excitement of explanation it was impossible to keep his seat. “He hid himself in Humayûn’s tomb at Delhi, and they killed his sons. But that was quite a different Humayûn from the chap who built Humayûnabâd. This wasn’t one of the Mogul Emperors at all: let alone that this Humayûn lived three hundred years before the time of the mutiny,” and here Rood came to a pause, standing with his hands in his pockets in almost a threatening attitude opposite Captain O’Maley.

“Oh, at Delhi, was it?” said the other, indifferently. “I

thought it was here," and he offered his cigar-case to his next neighbour.

Rood walked back to his seat and sat down. Bertie felt annoyed by the rudeness of the other man and spoke to the newcomer. As the conversation went on he had occasion to observe Rood's constant habit of getting up from his seat and sitting down again, of sometimes changing his place, of crossing and uncrossing his legs, and the keen interest which he took in everything which came up for discussion, contrasting with the lazy Indian afternoon manner of the others.

After dinner Herbert went back early to his tent; his ankle was inflamed, and it required an effort to walk there without limping. Rood, coming in a little later, found him holding his foot in cold water.

"You've hurt your foot? I thought I saw you limping just now. Stay: have you got any arnica? I've got a bottle somewhere." And he began turning all his things out upon the floor.

"It really doesn't matter," said Herbert.

"Oh, I'll find it in a minute. I know I have a bottle somewhere. . . . Well it's odd too. I thought I'd got one. I suppose I left it out, after all. Have you twisted your ankle or what?"

"A boar did it. It seems he——"

"Oh, you've been pig-sticking. Isn't it splendid. ('Splendid,' he pronounced it.) I thought you'd been out shooting with the others."

"Yes," said Herbert, warming. "It seems stunning sport. It's the first time I ever went out, and it was rather bad luck getting this twist."

"It's a thing ye never get tired of. It's something quite different from fox-hunting at home,—though it's a long time since I've been there—being your own pack, so to say, makes quite a different thing. Somebody's bound to be in at the death or there'll be no death at all."

They enlarged upon the subject. Herbert described the run.

"I suppose there's no fox-hunting in India to speak of?" he said, presently.

"Well, there's some in Bombay."

"Oh, yes, I know. But it's awfully poor sport."

"No, there's no fox-hunting here to speak of, leastways not in the plains. There's a pack at Peshawar."

"Is it long since you've been home?" Bertie asked.

"D'you mean is it long since I've been in England?"

"Yes."

"I've not been for fifteen years: not since I came out here."

"By *Jove*! Don't you ever take leave?"

"If I take leave I generally go up into the hills, into Thibet, or somewhere like that. I've been into China once, and I'd like immensely to go again. And I've been to Egypt twice, and that's the farthest west I've been for fifteen years." Rood had an odd way of shaking his head at the end of his sentences, as if he were a dog worrying a rat.

"Really. Don't you care about England, then?"

"Not a rap."

"I heard you were a great swell at Oriental languages and all that."

"A great swell: oh, I'm nothing of the sort. Those fellows think—they only learn to pass their examinations. I don't suppose I'd be able to pass in anything but Hindustani now, and I only know that because you must after fifteen years. I don't care a half-penny rush for that."

"You don't? How do you mean you don't care?"

"Oh, I don't suppose I'd be able to explain it to you. Hindustani—Urdu, that is—it's not a native language at all."

"Ah, no: I know. You mean not a regular national tongue."

"National language—that's more the word I wanted. Urdu means camp language, you know. It's just the *bât* of the soldiers of Akbar and all those." He shook his head and fidgeted in his chair, crossing and uncrossing his legs. "Now it's Sanscrit ye ought to learn."

"Oh, yes, I dare say." Herbert laughed. "Of course, I know it's the literary language."

"Have you ever been up north yet?" asked Rood.

"No: of course I mean to go before I leave India, if I do leave. I'm almost thinking of staying."

"Ye are? Where would you settle and what would you do?"

"Well, I have thought—it's only a vague idea with me, as yet—of practising as a barrister."

"Where would that be?"

"In Bombay."

"Oh!" and Rood's voice dropped to such a tone of disappointment that Herbert Vanlennert laughed again.

"Why not in Bombay as much as anywhere else?" he said.

"Oh, Bombay, it's not India at all. But have you got an opening there?"

"I can't exactly say that I have. But there was a man there, Abernethy, who's just been made a judge. He had much the largest practice in the place, and I know a good many people think that one would have——"

"Well, I'd thought at one time of the bar here in India. My father—he's dead now—— But I'm glad I didn't. It's not India at all being in a town like Bombay."

"No, of course, it's not native India. But, then, I don't know that I want to be a native, and I couldn't be if I did."

Rood did not smile; he gave a great sigh.

"Oh, the natives, now, they're nothing—themselves. But the lives they live and the villages and—— Have ye noticed the bullock-carts? Aren't they wonderful?"

"Wonderful? Well, I don't know——"

Rood had jumped up from his seat and was walking about the tent puffing hard at his pipe. "Well!" he cried, taking the latter out of his mouth, "I thought you'd have been struck with them at least. They're the most wonderful things I ever knew. Ye'll see the exact like of them on Assyrian carvings in London. I've got the books."

"Oh, in that way, yes. They're wonderfully antique-looking, I know that," Bertie answered, waking up to enter into the thoughts of his companion. "I've seen those Assyrian carvings too—and——" But here the vision of the fakir of only yesterday suddenly returned to him, and he felt a sort of coldness down the back. "Yes," he said, "you do feel that there's something strange and antique behind everything you see."

"That's it: you've just said the right thing. It's not here but it's behind everything, as if it had been buried in the soil. And you feel it wherever you go—it's in the air like. It's in the jungle as much as anywhere else, for what's jungle now it's very likely been a flourishing city in the time of the Pathans. When I used to go about more——" But here he came to a sudden pause and heaved an audible sigh, for he remembered the tie which kept him as near as possible to Humayûnabâd. "That's what made me ask if you'd seen the Himalayas," he went on, rather irrelevantly, the more so that he had never asked any such question. "It's just in that great plain somewhere about Umbala—if you're standing, say, with nothing but camel-bushes and dry grass about ye and all the dust rising and that,

and the tree-tops, they're mostly those tamarisks you know that seem to vanish away altogether at the top in the sunlight like a yellow mist and the kites turning and turning over them till the light makes them vanish right away, and then on the horizon you see nothing at all. But ye see hung in the middle of the air a great bank like of white. It's like a cloud, and yet it isn't. And that's the Himalayas. That's where the Aryans began to settle down—on the plain, I mean—those that wrote the Vedas. And you think of them in bullock-carts just like the ones you see—and going on and on over the great plain under the sun and under the stars, and—— No person can explain to another what he thinks," he said, coming to a sudden pause.

Yet into Bertie's mind, too, though he did not seize very exactly the ideas which Rood was trying to express, there shot the same overwhelming sense of the immense spaces of time and distance, which at once lay as it were within the reach of his hand and escaped him forever; the same infinite murmur which he had heard the past night as he stood under the stars came to him and fled him at the instant.

The sensation had come and gone. "The Vedas?" he said, vaguely, merely because the name remained in his mind.

"Of course, if you don't care for the Vedas ye don't care for India!" said Rood.

Vanlennert burst into a loud laugh, in which the other joined quite heartily. "I'm afraid not very many men can care for India, then," the former said. "I've tried some bits of translation," he went on, presently, "some bits of Max Müller I saw in reviews. It didn't seem—— Well, I suppose it was beyond me."

"Ye must get into it, of course, and, of course, ye must live in the country. I'm just on the Vedas now. I'm making some bits of translations. Let me read ye wan or two." Rood spoke with stronger Irish accent than he had done a short while ago. He went again to his bullock trunk, and once more turned out everything on the floor. At last he fished out a pocket-book full of many little scraps of paper.

"I might take anny one of them," he said, as he turned over the scraps in his fingers; "they're all beautiful and . . . But I don't suppose it would be annything to you," he said, pausing suddenly.

"But, anyway, I would like to hear a little," said Herbert.

"You know these are all hymns—to the sun or the morning

fire or the storm or something," he said, by way of pre-

"But a good many people dispute that, don't they?" said Herbert.

"Oh, there can't be any dispute about it whatever," said Ed, impatiently. "Just listen to this one, for instance,—

"Savitar, the god, arose, in power arose
Us quick deeds and us journey to renew;
He 'tis who to all gods dispenses treasure,
And blesses men who call um to the feast.

The god stands up and stretches forth us arm,
Raises his hand, and all obedient wait;
For all the waters to his servus bend,
And the winds even on his path are stilled.

Now he unyokes the horses who have borne um;
The wanderer from his travel now he frees;
The Serpent-slayer's fury now is stayed;
At Savitar's command come night and peace.

And now rolls up the spinning wife her web;
The labourer in the field his labour leaves;

* * * * *

And to the household folk beneath the roof
The household fire imparts their share of light.

He who to work went forth is now returned;
The longing of all wanderers turns towards home.
Leaving his toil, goes each man to his house.
The universal mover orders so.

* * * * *

And, as he can, each fish in the womb of water
(Who restless flits about) seeks now his rest;
The bird maked for his nest, cattle for their stall;
To their own home all beasts the sun-god sends.

"But you've got to be regularly—what do you call it?—peped in it, in the country, to understand it properly," said Ed. "When ye get the creaking of the bullock-carts in yr ear, or the groaning of the water-wheels so that you seem rays able to hear them, or those great skins they pull up—I'll have seen them about here (up north they have more ter-wheels like they have in Egypt—you've never been ere?—they call them *sakiyas* there)—they give a sort of an, too, as the bullock walks down-hill and then go splash er."

"Yes, I've seen that," said Herbert, nodding assent and

entering more and more into the thoughts of his queer companion.

"It's fine when you're out and you come upon one of those villages close by the jungle in the evening when the dogs bay at you and the blue smoke goes straight up—only it stinks beastly, that's the worst of it: it's camel dung they use, as I daresay ye've found out—and then there's just a moment or two of twilight and bang comes the night, and ye see Venus as big as a little moon. . . . This is a kind of evening hymn," he said, suddenly beginning to read again. And thereupon he read another translation.

"It's that dull creaking sound," Rood went on, after he had finished, reverting to an idea which he seemed to have abandoned long ago, "which seems to fit in, I couldn't tell you why, with the verses of the Vedas, only, of course, you don't get any of that in a translation."

"But I thought the translations uncommonly good. Are they yours? Is the metre copied from the original?"

"It is. As much as possible. The people singing, it's almost the same groaning sound," Rood continued, still haunted by the idea which he wished to express. "You'll have heard them, I daresay, Ya-a-ng,"—and he gave an imitation of the native chanting which brought it back vividly to his companion's mind.

"I suppose you're going to publish your translation when it's done?" Bertie said.

"Publish it? No; where would be the use of publishing it? It doesn't mean anything at all to any one who's not been here. And if there's any one who cares at all about that sort of thing he learns Sanscrit. No; it's just for my own pleasure I do it."

To Herbert, whose literary associations had been with journalists, this answer made his companion seem more strange than ever.

If possible that is to say; but he was almost beyond surprise. He contrasted the present occupier of Jerningham's chair with his companion of last night, the little captain in flannels and a cricketing blazer, with his banjo, and this man in his suit of dark kâki—he still kept on his boots and gaiters—each representative of India to him—and yet of two worlds which had no point of contact—and he forced himself to stop trying to reason on his impressions, remembering Jerningham's philosophic phrase: "Take everything as a matter of course, here."

"Have you been much over India?" Herbert asked.

"Not as much as I would like," and the other once more gave a sigh. "I've been learning *Pushtu* a while."

"*Pushtu*, what's that?"

"What the Afghans speak. If I could only get over there I believe I'd find out a lot about them. I tell ye, there's a country which runs up to the Hindu Kush mountains. It's everything to have it explored and surveyed. But I'm chained to this part."

"Oh, are you? Why? Don't they ever change people about?"

Rood made no answer at all to this question. He gave another sigh, and half absently poured himself out a second three-finger peg, and then—

"Were ye ever in love?" he asked, suddenly.

It was said so exactly in the manner of one of Thackeray's Irishmen that Bertie burst out laughing once more.

"Ah!" said Rood. "Ye never have been, else ye wouldn't laugh."

"You have, anyhow, I see," said Herbert.

"It's just that that keeps me here."

"Of course, if you're thinking of getting married . . ."

Bertie began as a sort of feeler.

"Oh, I'm not thinking of getting married," said Rood, and then remained silent for a few minutes. "But it's just that," he began again in a changed tone, "that keeps me here. If it wasn't only for that I should chuck this forrust-work (though some ways I like it well enough) and go right out to Kabul with a friend of mine. He's a wonderful chap. Sadler his name is; he's an engineer. The Amir's invited um to Kabul to set up gun-foundries and I don't know what not. He's been out once, and now he's going to settle down there. They say he carries his life in his hand; but it'd be just fine to get a sight of some of those frontiers where no Englishman has ever been. If I could have gone out with Sadler I'd have got the Amir to let me explore about the whole of Afghanistan. Oh, my! that would be fine. You've no idea what an unknown country some of it is."

"By Jove, I'd like to go," said Bertie, infected by the other's enthusiasm.

"Well, you might. It would be much better than barristering in Bombay," said Rood.

"I mustn't let this chap's talk run away with me," Herbert thought. "Yes," he said, "it would—only . . ."

"Oh, it wouldn't do for you," Rood put in. "You want training for that sort of thing and you should know *Pushtu*."

"Well, I could learn," said Herbert. And, now that the other had pooh-poohed it, he began seriously to think of the possibility of going. "But of course I don't know Sadler," he said. "That would be the great difficulty."

"Anyway, ye'd be glad to know him," said Rood; "for he's a wonderful man, and he'll be in Bombay next month. I'll give you a letter to him."

The more he thought that night, the more the idea did present itself to Vanlennert as a possibility. If he could give up the estate altogether into the hands of Uncle George—lay down the existence of which he seemed to have made such a failure, and embark on one which was utterly new.

In a sort of agony, as he lay in bed that night, he thought of the different men whom he had met since he came out to India, from Sir Hardinge More himself down to this Rood—Sharpe, Jerningham, Fairbrother, these men all had their niches in the world, what they rightly called duty, "being on duty." And each seemed fit for his place—alert and fit and happy. He, he alone was a drifting log upon the wide sea of life.

For the sensations of the last two days had been too moving—most of all the news of Silvia's death. And behind all chance excitations there was always at the back of Herbert's mind the feeling of one who keeps back a guilty secret and is ashamed to face the truth.

"By Jove," he said at last, as he tossed wakefully—and his inflamed ankle kept him in a fever—"I'll try Lady More and have it out with her."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"It's Kitty I'm the most sorry for," Bertram said to himself. But even as he said this he reflected, as he had often done of late, how impossible it is for an old friend to see into the thoughts of a child grown almost a woman, a child in whose existence—to transpose slightly a phrase of Elia's—he had hitherto seen little else than cake and oranges. Mrs. Maynard's grief he could understand; but it left his sympathy dry-eyed. Did she really think that her husband had gone

into eternal fires? If at the bottom of her soul she believed this—even suppose she never allowed that thought to formulate itself—was anyone in the world to be pitied more? But then it was next to impossible to picture quite what she did believe or disbelieve.

Whereas Kitty's more human losses were much more appreciable. They meant, at any rate, the deprivation of all the means for, and of all support and countenance in the natural enjoyments of her age, and, besides that, an unknown quantity of genuine sorrow for her father. Bertram, who, once his mind was attracted to a question, was wont to probe it to the bottom, acknowledged to himself quite frankly that it was impossible to guess how much genuine affection had subsisted between father and daughter. Maynard was an egoistic fellow, there could be no denying that; there was much that was attractive in his genius and much that was plaintive about him and his history, and with the tradition of friendship between him and Bertram there was enough to genuinely wring the latter's heart at his death. But what there had been in his character precisely apt to appeal to Maynard's own children he could not tell.

With or without reason, there could be no question that Kitty made an exquisitely sympathetic figure, and a very picture of beautiful melancholy. She had been horribly shocked. Her heart was at the same time tender and egoistical. Nobody, not even her father, had seemed to her to take any real trouble to make her happy: and not to do this was to commit a sin which she *could* not altogether forgive. She had begun to fancy in a whimsical way that her father's illness and the change that, since last spring, she had observed in his manner to his friends and in his way of life had prevented her from seeing so much of Bertie as she might have done; that if she had seen more of Bertie he might never have gone away, but, on the contrary, might—who knows? (Whimsical and ridiculous past imagining are the fancies and "supposes" of an egoistico-sentimental child, and her resentments against all things that run contrary to such fancies.) All this had made a leaven of bitterness in Kitty's soul.

But she was soft-hearted as well, and the memory of the change in her father's manner towards her some months before he died and her own unresponse smote her with a horrible pain. All seemed concentrated in that appealing look of the eyes in the last half-hour that she had sat by his bedside. She had

had one last gush of sorrow and tenderness; but had it not come too late? Those eyes haunted her.

Churton and Bertram were the two executors. The former concerned himself with the business external to the family circle, the latter with more intimate questions. It was Churton who arranged the exhibition of Maynard's works—it came in very well in February, when Parliament was sitting again, while there was not yet any talk of studios or Show Sundays—which added considerably to the very slender capital that the painter had left. It was only quite lately that Maynard had begun to get good prices, or had got himself quite clear of debts.

It was a little before the end of February—Maynard had died on Christmas Eve—that the accounts for the exhibition were got in. These and the sale of some small pictures and sketches (and a hundred pounds which had been anonymously sent to Churton “from an admirer of Henry Maynard's genius”) made up between three and four thousand pounds. About the same sum would remain in the hands of the executors from Maynard's savings, when all existing calls and the quarter's rent and taxes should have been paid. Mrs. Maynard had a hundred a-year of her own—in all three hundred and fifty about, for a widow with seven children.

Bertram had been discussing these matters and all the questions of ways and means. (Mrs. Maynard was too genuine a person to pretend that her grief prevented her from talking on matters of business.) Now he wandered into the deserted studio, where, as he rather expected to, he found Kitty.

No shrouded mourning chamber could have given a picture half so wretched as this brightly-lighted workshop from which all that once gave it meaning had been carried away. Every picture, every roughest sketch, had been taken from its walls—either to be sold or else to be religiously guarded by Mrs. Maynard (except a few nude studies, which would have fetched something in the market, but which, her principles allowing her neither to keep nor sell them, she had secretly burned). Bare nails or the holes out of which they had come ranged along the walls, and mortar-dust lay along the edges of the floor. The easels had all been piled on one side—the one or two comfortable chairs taken away (Mrs. Maynard had begged Bertram to take back as a memory one that he had himself given to her husband) and the standing book-shelf—on which still lay some poor stray rags—had been moved a little from the

Beside this book-shelf on a stool sat Kitty reading, try-drown thought in her books. But when Bertram came looked up at him almost as a girl looks up at her lover.

the reciprocal sentiments of these two were at this t curiously alike. Bertram had intellectually all his hies awakened for the whole of Maynard's family. But y he found it hard to sympathize with anyone but Kitty. itty, who was shocked at her own hardness of heart and hat she had real capacities of loving, found it easier to l them upon "Uncle Ned" than on anyone else who be- to her father.

ell, Kitty, my poor little dear," said Bertram in his half-lf-playful manner. And Kitty jumped up and gave him

say, if you want books to read I can lend you any you 'mine," he said.

a, thank you."

should think I might have a pipe here," he said, looking

a, yes, certainly." She liked Uncle Ned ever so much that he did not think it necessary to sigh audibly. He wn on another stool beside her.

ou oughtn't to stick here too much you know."

only come here very seldom, really. Oh, and Uncle . . . ?"

hat?"

dn't you say you thought I might go to the Slade School ewhere?"

h, well. That's very awkward. Things have rather ed, I'm sorry to say."

ow changed?" She looked up anxiously.

ell, in this way. It seems your aunts . . ."

ant Dora and Aunt Margaret do you mean?"

es; your aunts Dora and Margaret at Norwich have a . . ."

a—h! They don't want us to live there?"

es. That's just what they do want."

a, but why should we? Oh, Uncle Ned, you won't let us re?" Kitty's voice had a tragic break in it, and she put ad on Bertram's arm. He gave a sudden start.

ow can I help it, my poor child, if your mother wants to

a—h! I shall *never* see anyone I care for, I shan't see you

or . . .” She put her head against Bertram’s shoulder and sobbed. “Oh! It’s too fearful.”

“Don’t, Kitty. *Stop*,” he said almost severely, and Kitty did stop and looked up. Uncle Ned’s face was quite pale.

“He’s just as sorry as I am,” she said to herself. “He’s the only person who cares for me, he and Laura, and I shall never see them again,” and the tears began to flow once more.

“I’m as sorry as you are,” Bertram said in a kind grave voice, taking her hand and stroking it. “But there’s no use crying over spilt milk. The thing is that it seems they have a spare house . . .”

“Oh, I know—just next door,” said Kitty, with horror.

Bertram could not help laughing a little at the way this was said.

“Are they rather—what you’d call old cats?” he said sympathetically, but in a lighter tone.

Kitty too recovered. “Oh, they’re *kind* enough,” she said, lugubriously.

“Well, that’s something,” said Bertram, laughing again. “I expect they’re awfully fond of you. Didn’t you stay there with your father two years ago?”

“Yes, only a week; and of course that was different. It was at Cromer then.”

“Oh, yes. It’s different, of course. I tell you,” he said, sympathetically, “I’m as sorry as you can be. It won’t suit your book I know. But you see, it’s a question of ways and means. They offer the house rent free, and then of course living in the country is a lot cheaper.”

“Oh, Uncle Ned,” said Kitty, “you are nice!” She was going to put her head on his shoulder again, but he straightened himself somehow so that that was impossible.

“Of course I shall come down and see you as often as I can. And I shall suggest to Churton that he should ask you to stay with them.”

“Will you? Oh, that will be jolly.”

“And then there’s that friend of yours, Mrs. Anstey.”

“Laura? Yes, Laura said she would ask me to stay with them in June or July.”

“Well, then, there’s one thing I advise you to do. Get on as well as you can with your drawing—Churton says you don’t draw half badly—and all that, and then, when you’re a little older, I dare say we could make some plan for you to come up and go to the Slade or somewhere. See?”

And when he had said that Bertram made some haste to get away.

"He's awfully kind, Uncle Ned. But he does not care for me—really *me*—any more than anybody else does," thought Kitty, with a sigh, as she went back to her book.

Dull, sublunary lovers' love
Whose soul is sense, cannot admit
Of absence, 'cause it doth remove
The thing which elemented it.

Her love could admit of absence. Was it to Bertie far away in India that it went at that moment? or to whom or what? Kitty sank back into a mystic dream of love which was half human, half spiritual, wherein the thought of Herbert in India was strangely blended with a figure of Jesus in a stained-glass window which had been her earliest adoration.

"What an extraordinary thing," the philosophic Bertram said to himself that evening over his book—"a disgusting thing, by Jove, shameful, disgusting! I'm exactly in the position of an uncle to her." And he went on reading.

"It's wonderful how she looked sitting on that stool with her head against the book-case and the light falling on it from above. By Jove, what a study it would have been for poor Maynard. I quite understand all that sort of thing. The reflected light—it's marvellous what a rich colour she has when she flushes the least bit." It was strange that such a paragraph as this should have been found in a page of Professor Carlo Cantoni writing upon Immanuel Kant, and stranger still that the philosopher's words should have made Bertram sigh so deeply.

"I wish to the dickens now that I had stuck to the bar. I might have been making a lot of money by this time," the Italian philosopher continued. "Old Marchant was quite right in the jawing he gave me for giving it up. Suppose I had two or three thousand a year now, I might take the whole family on my shoulders. Kitty, at any rate, would have been all right. What an *awfully* dull time she will have down there, poor child! and perhaps marry some unmitigated cad. I wonder if—No; that's not to be dreamt of." And he made a violent effort to master his wandering thoughts: so that now the professor spoke in a quite different strain. "Therefore Kant ought to have given us in succession to the *Kritik a General Metaphysic*

[*Metafisica generale*], a *Rational Psychology*, and a *Rational Physic*. He has, however, only given us the last of these under the name of *The First Principles of the Science of Nature* (*Naturwissenschaft*), published by him in 1786. Why did he never give us the other two? . . ."

CHAPTER XL.

"OH, a very jolly time, indeed; in fact, I've had no end of a time since I came out. Only it's all play and no work, you know. I ought to be getting back I suppose."

"Well, you don't tire us; I've enjoyed your visit very much indeed, dear Herbert. And I hope . . . Do you think your visit here has done you good?"

"I feel as right as a trivet."

"I mean . . . I thought before you came out you had been getting into some trouble."

Herbert's face over-clouded. "Well, yes—in a way—I'd been getting—into what you'd call bad ways," he said, with his disarming smile.

"Do you know I'm more afraid of that for you than I am for most people. . . ." She expected him to ask "why," and found his silence rather discouraging—and how pale he had turned; perhaps she had better not go on. "If you could only find some nice girl whom you liked. . . ."

Bertie breathed more freely. Twenty times he had made up his mind to ask Lady More categorically what she knew about his father, or rather if she knew anything about his mother, and every time he had "funked it." Now the reprieve made him smile again. "Such as . . .?" he said.

Lady More smiled, too. "Yes; I did think of Rose Abernethy, but I see you could not care for her. . . ."

"How does she know that? I'm not by any means sure," Bertie said to himself.

"And besides, I find—I believe—well, I ought not to say that, but I may tell you in confidence, she cares for some one else."

"How very odd!" Herbert thought; "she never made any sign of that. I wonder who it is—Fletcher or Tom Yeastman. No, impossible. It couldn't be Masters—he's good-looking

enough, but then he's not after her a bit ; so if it is . . ." And now that Lady More had definitely abandoned the idea of his marrying Miss Abernethy, he began to think he had by no means given it up himself.

"However," Lady More went on, "we've no business to discuss that question. Only you're quite old enough to marry now, Herbert, and your position is . . ."

"My position ! What is my position ?" he cried.

"Of course I know, you've told me, the estate is very much encumbered. But then . . . I'm the last person to advise a worldly marriage ; but it seems to me you've a right to ask that your wife should have some money, and there are so many nice girls now, the daughters of rich men, you know."

"By Jove, I'm in the most horrible position," Herbert said, not paying much attention to this speech. He got up, put his hands in his pockets, and walked up the verandah.

"What is it ? Why are you not more frank ?" Lady More spoke almost severely. He had so often told her that there was no serious entanglement.

Herbert came and stood before her.

"What sort of a person was my mother ?" he asked.

("Ah ! That's it. . . . Poor boy ! . . . Has he never heard anything at all about her, then ?") Out loud, she said—

"Your mother ? She died when you were quite a little child. You wouldn't remember her at all."

"I do remember her a little bit," said Herbert, sadly. The vision of the Day of Judgment came back upon him ; he couldn't deny his own mother. "But—Oh, my God !" he went on, "it's frightful—I came across an old woman once who said . . . she was my . . . mother's sister !" He turned aside and held his hand to his throat, for otherwise he knew he should break down.

It was in the verandah where they always sat, the same verandah from which he had looked out on Back Bay soon after he came to Bombay. Any member of the household might come there at any moment. Looking down, Herbert saw the same groups of figures on the beach that were always to be seen, diminished to the size of ants—he saw them only in a flash, a moment filled with agony and almost of envy of their lot.

"Ah !" Lady More gave a long sigh. "Of course I know that she was not married to your father when she went away with him, but . . ." ("She was not a mere abandoned woman,"

Lady More wanted to add, but tried to find a softer expression.)

Herbert took her meaning differently.

"But you *thought* she was afterwards: that's what you were going to say," he said. His eyes had grown fierce and haggard.

"Oh, no! Dear, dear Herbert. It's not so bad as that," Lady More said, putting her hand on his arm. "Do you suppose that your grandfather would ever have adopted you as his heir if he had not been quite sure? . . ."

"That's true," he thought. "That's just what I've always said to myself, and now if Lady More thinks the same. . . . But that's not all. . . . Did my grandfather know . . . what sort . . . of a . . . woman my mother was?" he said, growing very white as he formulated this thought.

"I don't know. . . . You must not think, dear Herbert. . . . your father told me all about it. . . . She was well educated—a governess I think." ("No one need be ashamed of my poor sister. She was as good a lady as any you'd find anywhere." How he remembered those hideous words!) Suddenly a new thought flashed into Lady More's mind. "How old are you?" she said.

"Twenty-six next May. . . . Why did you ask? . . . Tell me why you asked?" he said.

Lady More had grown white too. "I ought not to have asked. There was no reason. . . . Indeed there is not . . ." she faltered.

"There is. Tell me what it is. . . . I know. . . . You think I'm not"—he could scarcely nerve himself to bring out the word—"legitimate. Was my father ever married?"

"Oh, *yes*! You must not allow yourself to have such dreadful thoughts. I said, is it likely that your grandfather would not have satisfied himself about all that?"

Oh, God! It was too much: almost for the first time in his recollection—though he had been a frail and rather desolate, he had been a strangely stoical child—now almost for the first time in his recollection Herbert covered his face with his hand while a short sob caught him at the throat.

"And I know he was married," Lady More went on. "Your father told me so in a way that makes me sure of it. Your mother was dying. . . . Poor boy, you must not imagine it is worse than it is." And she put her hand on Bertie's shoulder. He was turned away.

"It's such a disgrace. . . . That's why I hate the thought of going back."

"But you can't give up your life there and all your duties; and of course people—most people—have always known what there was to know."

Herbert's mind, however, was still working round the subject that haunted him.

"She could not have been dying," he said. "I remember her."

"Is it possible you can?" said Lady More, startled. "But of course I know she didn't die for a year or two—some years it must have been. She got better in Madeira I think. You were born there, weren't you?"

"Yes. So they say," he said, with a tone of bitterness that came out in spite of himself.

"Herbert! What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, God!" he said, jumping up from the ottoman. He seized a piece of string from a work-table and twisted it about his fingers till it nearly cut into the flesh. "Oh, God, I wish I knew what I do mean—what anything means."

"You must accept things as you find them," said the other.

"Why must I?" he replied, almost angrily. "I've no business to—if there's any doubt. . . . And you have doubts, you know you have," he said, looking her full in the face.

It was true. Lady More had known more of Harry Vannennert's intimate life and thoughts at one period of his career than anyone. But there had been a point where all her knowledge stopped—the period of her marriage to Hardinge More and her departure to Malta. This was long before Bertie's appearance on the scene. She could not by any possibility, therefore, do more than guess and surmise.

"No, indeed, I'm not in a position to have doubts. I had gone quite away from Derbyshire before you came there. . . ." And as she saw that Bertie still looked dissatisfied, she said, "I'll tell you exactly what I do know."

"Yes. . . . That's the only thing," he said, setting his teeth.

"Of course I know that this poor girl—she was a governess at Lady Passmore's—you would not remember her, of course—I think. I know that she went away with your father. . . ."

"When was that?"

"I don't know quite exactly. It wasn't spoken of before me at the time, and your father did not tell me about it all till afterwards. . . . Nobody scarcely used to see him much then. . . ."

Lady Passmore herself was not a very nice person I fancy—we only knew her very slightly. It was two years after that that poor Harry—your poor father—told me he'd married the girl."

"Well, when was that, at any rate?"

"That he told me? I was . . . It must have been in '58."

"I was born in that year—in May."

"Well, then it's all right. For I know that it was true that he had married her—and it was in—May it must have been—that he told me."

"So I'm legally legitimate," Herbert said, with a groan.

"I shouldn't think any more of it," said Lady More. "All that, you may be sure, was enquired into. Of course—it's very distressing to think about. But there are so many people and so many families that have some slight blot like this one."

"I can't go back," said Herbert. "You must find me something to do here."

"Oh, Herbert! I think that would not be right," she said.

"It would. I can't go back. I'm certain about that. I can't go back," he spoke almost hysterically. But soon he grew more calm. "Look here," he went on. "I came across a very curious fellow at Magaon Sandri—where I was in camp with General Hotchkins, you know. We had a good long talk over India and everything to do with it—two days I was in a tent with him. I've never seen anybody since I came out so keen on India and everything to do with it—all this part of the East—or who knows it better. Well, he was advising me to try and get out to a friend of his who is in Kabul. Sadler his name is. Do you know him?"

"No, I don't. I dare say Sir Hardinge may know him."

"He's either in Bombay now or just going to be."

"But I don't understand. What did your friend Mr. Rodd—Rood propose that you should do with Mr. Sadler?"

"Oh, he didn't know exactly. He's given me an introduction to him. Of course it seems a wild idea. But the fact is I must do something. I shall go mad if I don't. I'd rather enlist, I think, than go back there. I shall write to my—to some lawyers in London, and have the thing enquired into. If it does turn out to be all right, then of course in a couple of years I'll go back—unless I really see some way of making money."

And though they still argued the question between them at length, Lady More could not move her guest from this resolution.

"I do remember Mr. Sadler's name now," she said, at the end. "When he comes to Bombay, or if he's here now, we could ask him to dine here quietly, and you might see what he was like."

In the event Robert Sadler came to tiffin. It was quite a small committee; only Sir Hardinge and Lady More, Captain Wilson-Brook, Vanlennert, and their guest. The moment the latter came into the room Bertie recognised him as one of his fellow-passengers on board the *Everest*, one of the many members of that large crowd whom he had no more than seen—and only seen him once or twice towards the end of the voyage.

Robert Sadler was a heavily-built man with rather heavy manners. But probably Rood on his side had written to him about Herbert, for he regarded him with a special attention.

"I've seen your face before," he said, under his eyelashes, while he still held Bertie's hand in a fatherly sort of way.

"Yes. I came out on the *Everest*," said Herbert, a little stiffly, withdrawing his hand.

"Did you remember me, then?"

"Oh, yes. I remember seeing you in the smoking-room."

"Yes, I was there. But only once or twice. I was quite knocked out of time. We had a storm just after Brindisi, Sir Hardinge. I'm the worst sailor that ever was."

Then they went in to luncheon.

"Yes, we were pursued by misfortune," Sadler continued to Lady More; "we had an accident in the mail—were you in that, Mr. Vanlennert? Why, of course," he went on, before Bertie had time to reply, and bringing his hand down on the table, "*that's* where I remember your face—in the railway carriage."

"No," said Bertie, "I wasn't. . . Oh, you looked in."

"Yes, I did," said Sadler, and he burst into a laugh which Bertie recognised completely. "I never saw anyone take an accident so coolly as our friend here," he went on to Lady More. "We'd all jumped out like, like—well, what you please; I was stopped a minute, and I looked through a window and saw this gentleman, who'd apparently just awoke from a pleasant nap, stretching himself and rubbing his eyes." And Sadler laughed once more. Everybody present looked with eyes of friendly admiration on Bertie, who became a sort of hero henceforth.

"That's the man for me," Sadler had decided: "if he wants to come out. I'll find a place for him."

"I knew he would," said Molly Vanlennert, two months after this: "I knew he wouldn't come back." She was trembling all over; and she made haste to gain her room and lock the door.

And on the day on which Molly got her letter Sadler and Vanlennert were in truth driving over an immense arid plain towards Candahar. In that vast and barren sea whereon the sun beat down monotonously, though there was no wind, from moment to moment great towers of sand rose into the air and came whirling and moving towards them like dancing dervishes. A range of red-brown hills shut in the view.

"Candahar's just behind those hills. You wouldn't fancy that it's in a valley full of orchards and all manner of fruit, would ye?" Sadler said.

He and Herbert Vanlennert—now his secretary—were going by this route towards Kabul.

"I never asked you," Sadler said, presently. "Are you an Englishman by birth, Mr. Vanlennert? You know yours is an American name."

"Is it? I didn't know. Of course a 'Van' always sounds rather American. But we got our name in an oddish sort of way, and I didn't know there were any others."

"Yes. There's a firm, Hicks, Vanlennert & Ward, in Philadelphia, who have a patent for a sort of water-mill. I got the Amir to set up some down there in the Candahar Valley. That's partly why I'm going that way. And one of the firm, Mr. Vanlennert, came over. They've done some work for the Russian government in Badakshan."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Herbert, after a pause, "if that were my cousin Edmund."

"Oh, you have an American cousin?"

"Not an American. He's an Englishman all right. We'd quite lost sight of him."

"Well, I have some letters of his somewhere. I'll show you them when we get to Kabul. I don't remember his Christian name."

"How extraordinary!" said Herbert, in reality speaking to himself.

"Yes, it would be odd if two long-lost cousins should meet in Kabul, of all places. For I expect him over again next year if you stay as long."

"Ah, but it's odder than that," Herbert said. "If it really

is Edmund . . ." He gave no further information, and they relapsed into silence.

CHAPTER XLI.

"ONCE more," thought Kitty Maynard, "once more I am going to have some enjoyment of my life!"

No hard-worked London clerk ever left behind him the squalor of East End London with more rapture than she steamed into it, past endless slate roofs with smoking chimneys, endless top-story windows out of which hung sometimes scraps of ragged clothing, sometimes complete bed-furnitures: some held bird-cages and not a few boxes of smoke-dried flowers. Now and again a factory chimney reared its head on high, and poured forth a volume of hot air and a thin line of smoke into the dusty blue of the June sky: and here a group of gas-meters, red and new-painted, looked like the toys of some Brobdingnagian child. A minute more, and with a clatter and an echo she entered the huge Liverpool Street station. But here her thought paused a moment to send one regret back to their dull house in Unthanks Road, Norwich; and that thought showed that Kitty was beginning to get a conscience now. The regret was that she could not have brought with her her little brother Harry to share this month of freedom; for Harry, who was now seven years old—he was the second Harry in that family and had been born soon after the death of the first—was the one member of the household who was entirely devoted to his eldest sister, and she was devoted not entirely to him. Mrs. Maynard feared for Kitty's unconverted influence on the child.

How wonderful it was to see Mr. Ayntree in the flesh once more, and to be bowled along in a hansom through the inexpressible London streets! How her life at Norwich at once fell off her like an old garment!—the eyes that young Mr. Packworth made at her in church: the attentions of Harry Edwards at the drawing-school. Kitty could no more have helped trying the witchery of her glances on these young men than she could have helped breathing; but she was ashamed of herself for so doing. How deliciously all that life seemed now to fade and disappear!

"It's six months since your poor father died," Mrs. Ayntree said, "and I'm going to take you next week to a dance at Lady Tennant's. She's only just opened her house again. You know she lost a daughter last November."

If Kitty's face fell at the beginning of the sentence, it involuntarily brightened at the end. Laura must know what was right: yet how her mother would be horrified, if she could know!

"Oh, but . . ." she began, in half-hearted protest.

"Oh, I know you're not likely to have a frock. That's a little present I'm going to give you, and . . ."

"Oh, Laura, you are good!" cried Kitty, jumping up and kissing her. As she did so she felt how much she, Kitty, had grown up since she last performed that act. She had been taller than her friend even then: now she felt not so very much younger. Great good looks are in the female hierarchy what brilliant honours are in the male: they level differences of age; but as in the case of the male scholarship or proficiency, they must await their time of full recognition, the moment of the lengthened skirt.

"And I propose," Mrs. Ayntree said, continuing, "that we set about ordering the frock this morning."

"I suppose," she said, as they were driving to the dress-maker's in a cab, "such a thing as a dance is never dreamt of at Norwich."

"Not by us," answered Kitty, smiling.

All her scruples had vanished. But an awe, almost religious, rested upon her, as it does upon those who have ever had by sharp lines to distinguish their come-out dress from all others. The getting it and its appanages leaves ineffaceable memories.

When the dress came from the makers and Kitty tried it on in the presence of Mrs. Ayntree and the maid, and took a long, long look at herself in the cheval-glass, all previous existence seemed as nothing, and the world itself to have begun rolling on a new course.

Yet at that moment Mrs. Ayntree had a sudden recollection.

"Oh, but, Kitty, you can't dance," she said.

"No—I can't," said the other, in an unconvinced voice.

"I mean that Harry said that after that accident you would never be able to waltz. You ought to try: have you ever tried since?"

Then it came back to Kitty as from afar off that she had,

ile she was in London, never been able to dance round dances ce that fatal accident at the Churtons'. Dancing had long en so utterly out of her way that Kitty had never given a ought to that fact. She remembered now how she had stood a corner that evening, and how "Bertie" had come and taken r out. Bertie himself was a far-off recollection now, to ich she looked back tenderly yet with a grain of self-con- npt. He had been very "nice." But then London must be ll of nice men.

"Come and try now," Mrs. Ayntree said, presently. Alas, tty had not only forgotten how to dance, but it was physically possible for her to turn with her heel lifted from the ground. Well, it can't be helped," said Mrs. Ayntree. "I should just y you've hurt your ankle. Don't say it's always like that."

And suddenly Kitty's delight and self-confidence suffered a ge shock. Bertie's face shone more clearly and more pleas- tly out of the gloom which had fallen around her—even Mr. ickworth and Harry Edwards came back to her thoughts ring that moment.

Sir William Tennant's interests were too much concerned in e matter to allow of the Tennants effacing themselves in a cial sense for the whole of the season. And as this was the ly "thing" of any importance they were giving, they exerted emselves to make it a success; that is to say, Mrs. Forster erted herself, and even Crawford gave his help. Lady Ten- nt was not capable of doing much; indeed, had she known her days of social struggles or social triumphs were pretty ll over now; and Sir William Tennant's gifts in that direc- on were almost a negative quantity.

As may be supposed, the position which Kitty Maynard occu- ed in all this performance was strangely different, when the rtain rose, from what it had been in her private rehearsals herself before her tall glass at home. No sooner had she tered into the full blaze of the house, its wide staircase and gh rooms, than the appreciation of this difference fell upon r like the sound of doom. For the first moments she felt as a actress might feel who has unaccountably broken down at a st performance and been hissed off the stage.

Laura knew few people there: Mr. Ayntree had been called ray at dinner-time and would have to rejoin them later. To : there, for a time at any rate, almost unnoticed, was what rs. Ayntree was quite prepared for—as anybody not specially

distinguished must be if they go out pretty widely in London. To Kitty it seemed the most terrible of humiliations. Why had they come at all? What, after all, were London and London Society to her? What could they ever be? Her eyes became fascinated by the dress of a girl standing up just in front of her, so that she almost counted the individual stitches which worked the pale-blue leaves and flowers upon the lovely creamy silk of the body. Next she noted all her bangles, two of diamonds, six others of gold; and the long chevette gloves which reached above her elbows. People came crowding backwards and forwards and recognising their friends. The scene turned and turned, until Kitty forgot where she was, though she still felt an infinite self-pity.

"Left all alone here: abandoned by everybody," she said to herself: for just now Laura had found a lady she knew and stepped aside a moment to speak to her. All of a sudden Kitty thought of Uncle Ned—might not he appear unexpectedly? Oh, what intense happiness if he were to! Then she started and blushed, for a rather richly-toned voice said from above her—

"Aren't you dancing at all, Miss Maynard?"

She looked up at the man who had spoken. He was not like Uncle Ned exactly: but there was something that reminded her of Bertram. The speaker appeared to Kitty to be of the same age, and like Bertram he was very strongly built—he looked as if he would be a sort of support. She said to herself later on that he had a nice manly face.

"No," Kitty answered, "I can't waltz;" and her self-pity blotting out the memory of Laura's advice, she began to explain, "I've had an accident. . . . I've not been able to dance round . . ."

"Have you had an accident coming here, do you mean?" It was Crawford Tennant with whom she was speaking.

"N—no"—It was too late to retract—"not just now. It was three years ago; I was travelling with my father." Her voice dropped as she came to this point.

"Oh, ah! Your father was a great friend of mine. How did it happen—the accident?" Crawford put in quickly.

Then she told him.

"Was that the Mr. Vanlennert I knew, I wonder?" Crawford had now found a seat beside Kitty and was looking into her eyes. Laura discreetly accepted an invitation to dance which came to her at that moment.

"Oh, do you know him?" said Kitty, brightly." Bert—Herbert Vanlennert his name is."

"What a lucky beggar!"

"Why?"

"Because he had the chance of pulling you up. Are you very fond of Bertie Vanlennert?" Crawford said, taking full account of Kitty's evident youth and ignorance of the world.

"No—yes—he's gone away. I like him." She spoke in some confusion. She suddenly remembered the last letter she had received from Bertie—it had been read over often enough—which was written when he heard of her father's death, and her eyes involuntarily softened. It was nice that this sort of 'Uncle Ned' should know him too.

"He's gone to India I heard: what is he doing there?" Do what he might Crawford could not make his tone seem friendly to Bertie.

"I think—he said—he had gone away somewhere farther off—into Af—Afghanistan, isn't it?"

"And where are you living now, Miss Maynard? I know my mother always wanted to call on . . ."

"Oh, we're not living in London now. We're in Norwich."

"Dear me. That's a pity."

There had been a theory current in the Tennant family that Bertie Vanlennert had gone to India because home had become unbearable to him since Silvia married. Crawford had only despised him the more for this piece of sentimentality. But at the same time the discovery that he had been making love to this girl as well all the time enraged him and suggested thoughts of revenge.

"One can't hear oneself speak in this row," Crawford said. "Let's go down-stairs, into the refreshment-room."

Laura was dancing: Kitty had an instinct that it was rather early to withdraw from public view; but she did not know how to refuse.

"So you're living at Norwich," Crawford said, when they were seated in the room at the bottom of the stairs, empty of anyone else but servants. "Who did you come here with?"

"Oh, Laura—Mrs. Ayntree brought me."

"I'm very glad she did." Crawford kept his eyes fixed on Kitty's face. "Of course if my mother had known where you were she would have asked you before."

"Oh, thank you."

"Oh, yes, of course. I suppose you're out now—eh? By

Jove, it's a pity you didn't come out in London. Do you have much fun down in Norwich? What sort of place is it?"

"Oh, no, I don't have any fun," said Kitty, confidently. "Mother doesn't like my going out to parties."

"I see: so you go when you stay away. Quite right. I hope you're staying away some time."

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"Oh, yes, I'm sure. Now London has got you it will keep you to the end of the season: unluckily we're very near that now. What a pretty fan that is!" And Crawford stretched his hand across Kitty's knee to take her fan. She did not quite like it: Crawford did not talk quite as she expected people to talk in the great world. It was not so *very* unlike Bertie's old way—perhaps—and yet she instinctively felt there *was* a great difference. Bertie never stared into your face as this Mr. Tennant did. Kitty tried to drown a natural preference for even the manners of Alfred Packworth and Harry Edwards.

"Oh, yes," Crawford went on, "I shall get my mother to ask you here if Mrs. Ayntree is tired of you."

"But . . . You're very kind . . . but I don't know Lady Tennant scarcely at all."

"You're father did. And I remember her speaking of you one afternoon last season. She'd met you at some garden party."

"Oh, at the Leybourne's that must have been on Ca . . ."

"And saying what an uncommonly pretty girl you would be."

Kitty blushed with pleasure: only she wished Mr. Tennant hadn't spoken quite out loud. Some people looked into the refreshment-room at that moment; and the servants at the end were always there.

"And she was quite right, by Jingo," Crawford went on, as the other couple withdrew their heads from the door-way. And he reposed the fan upon Kitty's knee.

"Perhaps—I think—I ought to go up-stairs again," she said.

"I don't see any necessity if you're not dancing."

"But . . . but I want to speak to Laura a minute."

"Ah, well, you mean you've had enough of me."

"Oh, indeed, I don't mean that, Mr. Tennant."

"All the same I shall look out for you at supper-time in case you want any one to take you in."

"Oh, thank you."

They separated at the top of the stairs. "Dear me, where have you been?" said Laura, meeting her in the door-way; but without waiting for an answer, "I suppose you thought I had cut off. I couldn't resist getting a dance while the room was so empty. But there are several young men dying to be introduced to you. I've told them you've just hurt your ankle and would rather not dance; but they'll be only too glad to sit out, I've no doubt. There's one!" and Laura beckoned with her head to a young man. The truth is she had been quite alive to Kitty's interests, and to the one or two young men there whom she knew had given such glowing descriptions of her protégée's beauty and in such clear tones that Kitty's position was every moment improving.

This first young man was one of the young Keyworthys. He was very fair, very colourless, and faultlessly dressed. In every way he reminded Kitty more of her Norwich admirers, and though his conversation was lacking in point, she felt more comfortable with him than she had done with Crawford Tenant; besides that, their respective ages were better matched.

While Kitty was sitting out with this partner, Effie Churton suddenly confronted her. Kitty recognised her easily enough, but at the same time was amazed to see how she had matured. He was on the arm of rather a comical-looking little man extensively bald and with large spectacles.

"Oh, Kitty, is that you? I'm so glad," and she gave her a hearty kiss. But she immediately turned back to her partner.

"I wish she was me," Kitty heard the little man say, "then should be her and you would be kissing . . ."

"Shut up," said Effie.

"You're always shutting me up," said the little man, coming very near and gazing at her through his spectacles.

"Because you always want it, I suppose."

"I don't want it. I should ask for it if I wanted it. I always do ask for what I want."

"Do you always get it?"

"Not always the first time. But I go on asking till I do."

"I should think it takes a long time, sometimes, doesn't it?"

"Oh, no. I never want anything but nice things you know—things that bless him—or her that gives and him that takes."

"Such as . . .?"

"Well, what I spoke of just now—or was going to speak of when you shut me up." And an unpleasant look came into the

dull eyes of Effie's partner, which seemed to be looking her all over.

Both Mr. Keyworthy and Kitty had seemed compelled to listen to this dialogue, he with a humble sense that that was the way he ought to have been talking instead of explaining certain details of the Health Exhibition, and she with the continual curiosity as to what the world was composed of and what men and women talked about therein.

"Shall I take you back, Miss Maynard?" Mr. Keyworthy's voice came to her ears. "I think the next dance has just begun."

"Oh, yes, please."

"No, stop a minute, Kitty; I want to have a talk with you," Effie called out as Kitty was moving away; then the latter saw that Effie's partner had gone and she was alone. So on her side she dismissed Mr. Keyworthy.

Miss Churton began at once to talk of the partner who had just left her. His name was Mr. Yeames Munn. This Mr. Munn was not a small man in his own eyes. He had inherited from his father when quite young the proprietorship of a country newspaper of importance, and had exchanged that for the still more distinguished position of proprietor and editor of a London daily. He had no literary gifts, but a very keen understanding of the tastes in certain directions of the London public. As a sporting authority his journal stood high, and it was much mixed up with music halls and with the stage. And in this connection the proprietor had in past days found advantages of many kinds.

Those who had known Fred Yeames Munn in his quite young days at Roughborough remembered a young man, in spectacles certainly, but with close-cropped hair and gaiters; for, though Fred Munn could not ride, he always wore gaiters then, and generally carried a switch. His memory of turf history was even then a matter of admiration, and his knowingness of service in increasing the circulation of the *Roughborough Gazette*, which added on this branch to its political and dissenting connection. Now, Mr. Yeames Munn had very much changed: he had become extensively bald for one thing and ambitious for another. He was working one of the divisions of his native town for the next general election.

"Well," said Effie, "that's my little man. He's awfully clever, you know people say, besides being awfully rich. I can't say I have noticed any particular cleverness in him my-

self. But of course newspaper people have to go in for a lot of things you don't care about. . . . I should like to have my husband in the House of Commons."

"Yes," Kitty began as heartily as she could, "it's much nicer to marry a . . ."

But the other would not wait.

"I like little men, too," she said, and her eyes gleamed. "I like the idea of being able to turn them and twist them about."

Kitty laughed. "But how do you want to turn and twist Mr. Munn?" she said.

"I don't know; I do want. . . . He's awfully gone on me, too, though he looks so quiet." Her under lip protruded unpleasantly and her eyes were still glowing. And somehow, though not a word had been said, the sensuality of Effie's thoughts flashed into the mind of Kitty by a sort of inspiration. She shuddered and felt cold down her spine. But she felt a certain interest too, a touch of curiosity and excitement.

"Do you ever see Mr. Pemberton now?" she said, suddenly. The name made her realise the extent of the change in her friend.

"Sometimes," Effie said, with indifference. "Hugo's a no-go: he's rather a stick, you know."

And now another man came to take Effie away. Kitty saw him look at herself and say something to his partner. But Effie did not introduce them, and Kitty went up-stairs alone.

She was surprised, but she had no space in her thoughts to harbour resentment or to pass judgment upon Effie's attitude of mind. The scene in which she was, this theatre of her great initiation, had undergone the most dazzling transformation. The large rooms were no longer alien and minatory: the crowd was no longer an oppression to her spirits. The innumerable flowers, the exquisite dresses, the bright and beautiful faces all around: had she in verity an hour ago found these things hostile and terrible? What magic, then, had so changed them? There was no room for reflection, nor for scruples of conscience, nor for criticism, much less blame of any mortal being in this incomparable world. To sum up all, Kitty was going to succeed and not to fail in the great ordeal of life: that tripos for which she had been preparing herself during every waking hour of the last week, which was to determine her estimate of herself through all the future: this is what her first dance seemed to Kitty Maynard.

She had not been happy under the first attentions of Craw-

furd Tennant, when it seemed as if he were to be the only person who noticed her. But after Crawford had come Mr. Keyworthy, and after Mr. Keyworthy had come Mr. Massy; he, too, had gone to Mrs. Ayntree to be presented. After that, the men had come in quick succession, some through former partners, some through Mrs. Forster, her hostess; and the more the tale increased, the more lustre was shed on each partner by the number of his associates. All the men she thought looked so smart, and most were so handsome and amusing. Mr. Massy was both these. When she sat with him a second time she thought she had not half appreciated his good qualities the first time. And that other little man, who was a friend of his and of Mrs. Forster's too, Mr. Glenbyre, said such funny things and then dropped his eyeglass in such a queer way that it was positively delightful.

Yes, it was just as she had said to herself the day before: London was full of nice men. (Poor Bertie! It would have been quite perfect if he had been there too.) Perhaps, perhaps if she had been perfectly free to choose she would have preferred to go in to supper with one of her later partners rather than with Mr. Tennant, who was, of course, a little old and—and—still, he too was awfully nice, as was everyone. He had been the first to come to her rescue. She felt sure he was as kind as possible, just like Uncle Ned.

After supper it was not quite so pleasant. Crawford made a great point of getting her a place, and called Blades to fill her glass whenever it was even half empty. Kitty was so touched by his kindness that, as he seemed to wish it, she sat with him for a long time on the landing after supper. She did not remember how long, nor what they had talked about. For, as she was not used to sitting up late and never drank any wine when at home, she had to make almost superhuman efforts to keep awake—to keep herself awake in every limb; for Mr. Tennant had somehow put his arm at the back of her seat, and when once she leant back she found she was leaning against it.

Crawford Tennant had talked to her in the way he talked to most of his partners, and many girls thought him agreeable enough; but on the whole he got on better with married women than with their maiden sisters.

Sleep came to her on her drive back. But when she got into her room and the maid came to unlace her dress, she started broad awake once more. Directly afterwards Laura came in.

my dearest Kitty," Laura said, kissing her friend nly, perhaps, than she had ever done before, "it's at you are a beauty." And led on by the excitement casion she proceeded to detail a variety of remarks een made to her, Laura, by the young men who had, s who had not, had the good luck to be introduced to , and then other remarks which had been dropped in earing, and what certain old dowagers had said. pos had been passed. She had come out a senior chancellor's medallist in beauty. Both Laura and that they stood upon a different mutual footing from twenty-four hours earlier.

her friend had left her, Kitty still sat on, staring into hs of her cheval-glass. It was wonderful, it had rything that she had dreamt after all—this mighty the history of nations had come and passed; she, d come out.

one she thought over all her partners of that even- e wondered who would be considered the best looking. ght that she herself liked Mr. Massy's face the best. was so tall—there was something imposing and noble looking down from such a height. One of her part- actually been a lord—Lord Fernshaw. But this fact so awe-inspiring that Kitty had never got a clear con- ' what he was like. Nor could she remember distinctly that he had said. Thereupon she began to recall some marks that her other partners had addressed to her, all the things that Crawford had said. But though tely kept before her mind the fact that Crawford y quite old, as old as Uncle Ned, there mingled in lections a something not wholly pleasant. Suddenly ory of Ioné Churton shot across her and the un- sense deepened.

ove it away. It was intolerable that there should be test alloy in her great night of triumph: and once turned to think of all the nice things other people had ggested or even looked, dwelling perhaps more espe- Mr. Massy's looks from his great height. All of a e went to her box and took a much-worn envelope . It was Bertie Vanlennert's last letter from Afghan- e second she had had from him. She set to work to rough once again.

"My dear Kitty," he wrote. "I have left India now and have gone to Afghanistan, and while there I have been travelling about a good deal, and so did not get some letters and papers which had been forwarded for me to Kabul. That is why I have only just heard the terribly sad news of your father's death. Poor Kitty! I hope you know how sorry I am. I am afraid you must feel dreadfully lonely: for as far as I could make out you and your mother did not exactly hit it off. You won't mind my speaking out about that? I should like greatly to hear from you if you care to write. Kabul, Afghanistan, will find me all right some time. It is ten chances to one that it will, at any rate. I would give a very great deal if I could have a chat with you once more, and learn how you are getting on, and tell you all I have been doing. It is possible I may get back to England in a year's time; I am sure I hope so—if it's only on a visit—and then I shall see how you are getting along. I came out here into Afghanistan with a man who, though he is an Englishman, is almost like a prime minister to the Amir. He brought me out as his secretary. I get on very well with the old Amir, too. I call him old: he is really not more than thirty-five, I believe. You've no idea what a lot of things I am going in for. Firstly, I work as hard as I can at the language. It's the first time I've ever sapped really hard at a living language. I've learnt all the ordinary infantry drill. I knew some before from being in the volunteers at Cambridge. Thirdly, I go about as much as I can and study the character of the country, and I've seen something of the tribes on the borders, though they are difficult chaps to have much to do with. I could write a book now about Afghanistan if I wanted to. But I don't care much for writing and that sort of thing now.

"I came out here, as I told you in my other letter, to stay with the Governor of Bombay and his wife: Sir Hardinge More his name is. He was awfully kind to me, and Lady More still more so. (That was not meant as a pun, though I remember Bertram once saying to me, 'You've many faults, Vanlennert; in fact, you're almost compounded of them. But I think the habit of punning I've sometimes detected in you is the most detestable of your vices.' He's an awfully good fellow is Bertram. I hope he's been of use to you. I feel sure he has; he's one of the kindest-hearted men going—though he's odd in some ways.) But, as I was going to say, though it was very jolly there I could not stand the idea of only idling: this

chance turned up and I jumped at it. People at home will think me a fool; for I get scarcely any pay at present. But the man I came out with—Sadler by name—is sure there is a tremendous lot for a man to do and learn if he keeps his eyes open.

“Now you see, Kitty, I’ve written a good deal about what I am doing. I would write a longer letter only I have to catch the mail. I shall expect you to write back as much or more about yourself. I suppose really you are grown up now: I ought to leave off calling you Kitty. I haven’t put in all the commonplaces that many people would write—‘If you should ever want a friend, etc.,’ which very often means, ‘If you should want a real friend don’t think of applying here.’ I don’t think there is any danger of your wanting any number of friends, dear Kitty—dear *Miss Maynard*, I mean. But I only wish I had an opportunity of showing what a faithful friend I shall be.

“Yours always,
“H. R. C. VANLENNERT.”

Then there was a postscript:

“I haven’t gone in either for offering what people call religious consolation. Only I’m bound to say I do believe in that sort of thing—all the chief things in religion I mean. I don’t know whether you do. Mrs. Ayntree used to profess not to, I know. Most people, I fancy, don’t know what they believe or disbelieve. Then, when a death or something comes, they have to make up their minds. But, out here, when you spend lonely nights under the stars, you seem to enter into that sort of thing better.”

How very different this was from the kind of talk that had been addressed to her that night! Yes; now she read it again, it was not a bit like Mr. Tennant: nor indeed anybody else. They were certainly much more—more polite. But, but—this letter was very sweet too. And in a sudden fit of remorse for the comparison she had instinctively made between Bertie’s small height and Mr. Massy’s great one, she kissed his letter many times and held it to her cheek.

“Bertie, Bertie!” she repeated softly to herself; and each moment the image of her former hero rose more distinctly before her mind. “Oh, Bertie, how I love you!” she went on, gazing into the depths of the mirror. “Why don’t you come back and see how beautiful I have grown? You must fall in love with me if you did.”

"Oh, Kitty, how beautiful you are!" she murmured to herself in tender accents, which were meant to be those of a lover. "What lovely, lovely blue eyes you have got, like a deep blue sea!"

'Her deep blue eyes were deeper far
Than water stilled at even.'

Kitty pushed the branch candle-holders to the back of the glass, so as to throw the light more fully upon her eyes.

"How the light plays on them as the sunbeams play in the clear blue water!" She shot a beam of passionate love out of the depths towards herself, so that she herself was fascinated by it. "Your hair, too—what a mass of it there is! falling around your face and almost covering your shoulders. Your shoulders are . . ."

Then a blush swept over her face, which became troubled by the shadow of Ionë Churton's thoughts and Crawford's looks, as clear reflections are troubled by a momentary breeze, and she turned away from the glass.

Her last thought, however, as she went off to sleep was how far away had faded already her Norwich life—perhaps it had gone for ever. For Mr. Churton, whom she saw in the course of the evening, had engaged her to come and stay with them when she left Mr. and Mrs. Ayntree.

CHAPTER XLII.

KITTY looked out of her window in the Hôtel d'Angleterre Les Preulx, Haute Savoie, and saw the sloping side of a hill right opposite; a hill which, when she stood a little way back, ran up out of sight. It had a fir-wood climbing up its steep side; but there were in the midst of the wood broad free patches which looked as if they had been ruled out with a ruler, and there the greenness of the grass and the steepness of the hill seemed almost beyond belief. Then behind this fir-grown hill there were, in gaps between the clouds, visions of unmeasured fields of snow, and again, more to the left, of precipitous peaks snow-lined in the crevices, cloud-girt, unreal, unimaginable.

It was very early; the first grey of dawn had begun to change

to a faint rosy light which tinted the clouds. The cattle were going out from Les Preulx to pasture, and the deep tinkle of their bells struck across another sound which was always in her wakeful ears day or night, the rumble of the glacier stream which ran down the valley. On the other side of the building it was a deep thunder; but from her windows only a rumble or half-musical drone, and on the hill-side over there it sank, as she knew, to be no louder than the humming of bees.

She dressed as quickly as she could and went out upon the hill, to watch alone the sunlight stealing down the mountain opposite.

It was intoxicating, this liberty of the woods and mountain-side after the long, long months that she had passed always in streets—even in Norwich she rarely saw the country. Yes: it was better than London even, though that had been almost perfection. Almost—why not quite? Kitty would not acknowledge now that there had been the faintest shadow upon that first season of hers—the first, the last, too, perhaps: who could tell? In reality the end had not quite kept promise with the beginning, with, say, the first romantic glance up to Mr. Massy's face at her first ball. That was like the evening vision of hills and lakes from a carriage-window, when everything is flooded with romantic light and scarcely seems of earth. She saw Mr. Massy once or twice after that first ball, listened once or twice to his grave and tender accents, and then heard that—he was engaged to be married!

After that, when at the Churtons', she had during a fortnight seen a good deal of Crawford Tennant, who had in a fashion taken possession of her as a friend of her father's, Kitty chose to think. The way he talked—she did not like it much at first—but it soon came to seem natural. Ionë Churton liked that sort of chaff, which was Yeames Munn's sort, too, and indeed that of many of the men who came to Palace Gardens: Kitty had grown used to Churtons ways by this time.

Whatever was disagreeable in her thoughts vanished now, beneath the immeasurable heights, the unspeakable sights and sounds. And Kitty loved scarcely less the never-ending bustle of their big hotel, the constant going and coming, the crowds in the coffee-room. It was in a great glass gallery joining to the hotel what had once been its *dépendance* that most of the visitors took their early *déjeuner* at little tables; and the waiters moved in and out among the groups as fish navigate among the rocks and sea-weed of an aquarium. She liked

the narrow main street of Les Preulx with its low houses and little shops, the guides who stood lounging about it ready for hire like the biblical labourers in the market-place. They wore soft felt hats with curly cock feathers in them, and thick boots and gaiters: and parties mounted on mules pushed their way among these crowds of guides, of tourists, hotel-servants, muleteers, drivers, towns-folk, peasants, who always filled the street and thickened into a dense mass at the corner when the diligence came in. Here was a mule party even now wending with silvery tinklings across the bridge.

However, she must go back, the others would be down by now.

She met Ionë just outside the door of the coffee-room, and the two girls went in together.

"No, not there," said Kitty, in what was meant to be a whisper, pulling back her friend.

"No—not there," said Ionë, in the same stage whisper.

And when the girls had found a table to themselves they bit their pocket-handkerchiefs and kicked each other and tried not to laugh, and gave side glances towards a certain table.

"I'm certain H. M. heard you," said Ionë.

"I don't care if she did," Kitty said, tossing her head, and they both spluttered once more.

From the tabooed table the severe eyes of a short lady in black followed them across the room. She was short, but she had a large nose, which she held rather high in the air, and that gave her a look of dignity. The friends of Mrs. Hawthornethwaite—still more the would-be friends—were in the habit of commenting on the likeness which they noticed between her and a very exalted Personage. The Hon. Mrs. Hawthornethwaite was the widow of the late dean of Windsor, and a personal friend of that other august widow. Royalty is known not seldom to drive over and lunch at Datchet Old Manor, the house in which Mrs. Hawthornethwaite has dwelt since her husband's death.

It was only Ionë Churton and Kitty who, in the insolence of youth and good looks, did not recognise the distinction conferred by these things.

"What a bore! she's coming to the picnic this afternoon," the latter went on; "she'll spoil everything."

"But I like Bertie, I shall spoon Bertie," said Ionë. (Bertie was Albert Hawthornethwaite, a youth from Sandhurst.)

"Fred won't let you," said Kitty, who was slowly winding the honey round the honey-spoon.

"Fred will have to, then. Besides, he won't be here till to-night. Do you know who he has been with?"

"No," said Kitty; but from her friend's manner she guessed. "Crawfurd Tennant."

"Oh," said Kitty, occupying herself still with the honey-spoon.

"You baby! He'll be here to-morrow or next day, Fred says—I've just got a letter from him. He doesn't know you're with us, does he?"

'Oh what a surprise,
Two lovely blue eyes.'

But perhaps you've been writing to him and told him."

"I'm sure I haven't."

"More fool you. You are a baby."

'Oh what a surprise,
Two lovely blue eyes.'"

And as she had just got up, she made a dance-step towards her father, who had just come near. "Good-morning, papa."

"I wish I could do that," Kitty thought, as she held her cheek to be kissed by her godfather. She was thinking of the dance-step. But at the back of the words lay another thought. "I wish I could like all men in the way that Ionë does." Man in the abstract was Kitty's most absorbing subject for thought. But man in the concrete? He was different somehow.

"Their style is detestable, both of them," Mrs. Hawthornethwaite at her table was saying to Mrs. Smiles, the chaplain's wife. "I should have thought that Mrs. Churton would have some idea how girls ought to behave. I believe they really do get asked out to quite good places. The other girl is—the daughter of a country lawyer or doctor or something of that sort."

"Oh, is she?" said Mrs. Smiles, who never contradicted anyone. "I thought I heard her father had been a painter, too."

"Did you? It may be so. I judged by a letter which that girl left on the writing-table and which I happened to see. It was addressed to a Mrs. Maynard in some street in Norwich. I supposed it was to her mother."

"Yes, she told me she . . ."

"There!" Mrs. Hawthornethwaite said, and slightly nodded her head to the left.

For the girls of whom she was speaking—or to speak more accurately Ionë Churton—had run down three steps on to the

terrace calling out, "Hollo, Mr. Pemberton!" Kitty only made one step in the same direction and then paused.

The apostolic Hugo stopped suddenly and looked up, then he blushed slightly. He shook hands with Miss Churton; then he saw Kitty and he blushed a little more.

"It's Miss—Miss Maynard, isn't it?" he said; and Kitty came forward and shook hands, and he went on to do the same to Mr. Churton.

"Well, how did you come to turn up here?" said Ionë, with her hands behind her back.

"I might ask the same question," said Mr. Pemberton, blandly.

"How awfully I used to be gone on Hugo!" Ionë said to her friend when they were alone. "But, of course, he's no good for that sort of thing, really."

CHAPTER XLIII.

ALL Kitty's insolence in the face of Mrs. Hawthornethwaite faded into dread when she found that by accident or design she was compelled to go in the same carriage with her to the five o'clock picnic. Ionë and Miss Budge, the American girl, arranged to share a mule between them, because they each wanted to walk half the way. "I don't think you'd be able to manage it," Ionë said to Kitty in her offhand way, and the latter, who had next to no pocket-money, was, of course, obliged to accept the conveyance provided for her. Her weak ankles did often prevent her from taking part in the amusements of the younger members of a party. She was obliged to go under the protection of Mrs. Churton; and Mrs. Churton's one principle in life was that if there were higher and lower social strata represented in any group in which she found herself, she was to be of the higher ones. It was a lugubrious drive. Kitty reflected at what a disadvantage it would put her for the remainder of the afternoon; for the rest of the young people were going to walk or ride on mule-back—with Mr. Churton and Mr. Smiles to act as a sort of chaperons—and so would be like a party already made up. Mr. Pemberton, her only old

acquaintance, would be sure to talk to Mrs. Hawthornethwaite; she was an "honourable" like himself.

The carriage road up to the plateau of Ste. Severine was so much the longer one that the two groups were not far apart. Kitty soon distinguished the impressive form of Mr. Pemberton. To her surprise, he scarcely exchanged half a dozen words with Mrs. Hawthornethwaite, nor, for that matter, with anyone else; for Hugo was easily disturbed when placed amid new surroundings. He saw, as he thought, Miss Maynard very merry and busy over the preparations for tea, and the chaff which accompanied them, along with other young girls and young men. They all seemed to belong more to the place and the occasion than he did: he longed for a Mrs. Ayntree to give him a countenance. When they all sat down, however, he took his courage in both hands and managed to edge himself to Kitty's side.

"Take care, Mr. Pemberton," she said, looking at him brightly, "you're putting your hand upon a thistle."

Mr. Pemberton looked down and plucked the flower. "Oh, no," he said, "that's not—well, on precisely a thistle. That's rather a—if I may say so—a—primitive mistake to make."

"I wish I did know more about flowers," Kitty said. "I'm afraid I'm very stupid."

"It certainly does make the country more interesting if one knows a little about the different flowers and their different classes."

But here Miss Budge, who had learnt that this was a kind of English lord, spoke from the other side of Kitty.

"I'd like you to tell me all you know about flowers, Mr. Pemberton. Because that's just one of the things which makes Europe so strange to us, all the flowers nearly being different. You know we haven't even got this one."

"Not the grass of Parnassus?—eh—no, I . . ."

"This one, I mean. Isn't that what you call a daisy?"

"N—no, I'm afraid not."

"Now! You see how ignorant I am," cried Miss Budge, triumphing.

"And that other flower," Kitty said, "what was that?"

"Knapweed."

"And it isn't a thistle at all?"

"I—I would not say 'at all.' It belongs to the thistle group, the *Cynerocephalæ*, if you like the Greek name. But

this variety, the *Centaureæ*, stand quite apart from what you would call thistles."

"I remember," said Kitty, rather vaguely, "dad—my father—used to show me the difference between some flowers and some others."

"Ah, yes, your father," said Hugo Pemberton, sympathetically. "He was an artist. He would be sure to know."

"But he did not know anything about botany. You know all about science, don't you? Ionë Churton told me. . . ."

Mr. Pemberton gave an uneasy laugh, what may be called the pedagogue's laugh. "I am afraid there are not many people who can be said to know all about science," he said. "At any rate, I am not one of them."

"Well, you know what I mean—all the principal things." Kitty began to feel quite happy now she saw how easily her neighbour could be embarrassed (and she had Mary Budge beside her to back her up. Sophy Smiles and Miss Anderton were also looking on in a thirst-for-knowledge attitude.) "I should like to know more about flowers. I wish you'd show us about—about what you said made them more interesting."

"Oh, yes, that would be interesting," Sophy Smiles breathed devoutly into the air.

"Hollo!" Ionë called out in a loud voice; "so you've turned up already." Mr. Yeames Munn's small figure and large spectacles had appeared upon the scene. Without any reference to the rest of the company, he immediately took his place beside his *fiancée*. They talked quite out loud: though their talk was solely for each other.

"I thought you were with Crawford Tennant," Ionë said. "What have you done with him?"

"Well, he wanted to do another peak, the Aiguille de something or other"—Ionë gave a glance round to try and take Kitty in. But she was evidently occupied with something Mr. Pemberton was showing her—"and I'd had enough of that I thought," Munn concluded.

"I don't believe you can do peaks."

"Don't you? Well, on the contrary, I believe you could if you were to try. Suppose you come—damn! confound it!" he began, and jumped up.

"Oh, don't mind me if you'd like a swear," said Ionë.

"No—I see he's talking to your father. You see what see

ing you does for a fellow. I came up here with a friend of Tennant's."

"Why, it's M. Desanges. I know him very well;" and Miss Churton got up to shake hands with the Frenchman.

M. Victor Desanges bowed with extreme politeness, all the more that he was inwardly fuming with rage that he should have been left as he had been by "ce M. Munn."

"Why, who's that?" said Miss Budge to Bertie Hawthornethwaite. Her interest in botany had begun to wane.

"Don't know, I'm sure; a Frenchman by the look of him. There are a good many about."

"And a hair-dresser at that you would say. Isn't Mr. Churton a beautiful-looking man?"

"Well, I don't know—he's pretty old."

"You don't think so? I think he's just lovely. My! Miss Churton seems to like the hair-dresser, though."

For Ionë, to flagellate the zeal of her lover, had begun to flirt with Victor Desanges most atrociously, and he was soon in a good humour again.

"I expect he's some very great man," Miss Budge said; "those Churtons know great people of all sorts." She said this to revenge herself on Bertie for looking on so scowlingly.

Mrs. Hawthornethwaite was noticing that too, as likewise the earnest botanical lecture which Mr. Pemberton was giving to Kitty. She had no girls of her own to interest herself in. But all the same her nose rose high in the air.

"Well, if we are going to see the cascade we had better go," she said; and a section of the party moved off in obedience to her command; Mrs. Smiles and the jolly Miss Champernowne led the way.

"Thomas," Mrs. Churton called out, "I shall go back. I have a headache coming on. Will you order the carriage?"

"I always think," Mrs. Hawthornethwaite heard Ionë saying—she had rejoined her partner again—"that his name is so appropriate. He's as beautiful as an angel."

"He's not *quite* as innocent as one, if all tales are true," said the other.

"All tales never are true," said Ionë.

"You see," Mr. Pemberton was saying to Kitty, "this belongs to the same class, and it has a square stem—stalk, also. Now there's another thing. A very large number of the flowers

of this class have a more or less aromatic or possibly a medicinal smell, you might call it. Sometimes it's agreeable and sometimes just the reverse. This particular plant—which, as you say, does look like a sort of nettle at first sight—is wild peppermint. You see what a strong smell it has;" and Hugo Pemberton, in the heat of his pedagogic zeal, went close to Kitty and held the plant to her nose. "Wild mint, wild thyme, all belong to this class—and dead-nettle itself, if you smell close, has likewise a somewhat spicy or druggy odour. I don't know if you know woundwort."

"No, I don't," said Kitty; and then looking round, "I am glad Mrs. Hawthornethwaite's gone; I do hate her!"

"That has the most curiously strong and pungent smell . . . Mrs. Hawthornethwaite!" Hugo looked up in surprise, "Where has she gone?"

"Oh, just down there to look at the waterfall."

Pemberton, on his side, had been much offended by some of the opinions he had heard Mrs. Hawthornethwaite express at lunch. "Yes," he said, forgetting his interest in botany to turn to a subject which interested him still more, "she appears to be quite the type of the narrow-minded country clergyman's wife."

"She's horrid," said Kitty, with conviction.

"There's no doubt," Hugo went on, "that women of that sort do an immensity of harm in the world, more, perhaps, than the most depraved men, just because they are incapable of seeing how much they sin against the light, and feel quite virtuous all the time; whereas a depraved man has at any rate some consciousness of sin. They think themselves quite good and religious women: and their idea of Jesus Christ is that he was a sort of Leading Counsellor of the Primrose League." But here Mr. Pemberton came to a pause, realising that the current of his thoughts was carrying him away.

This speech to Kitty likewise seemed to carry her far away from her present surroundings. True, she was more absorbed in noticing, by occasional rapid glances, how the sunshine turned Mr. Pemberton's beard a bright gold colour than in listening to what he said. But she recognised familiar phrases, such as "conviction of sin" and the name of "Jesus," which took her far back to her home in Norwich where she had left her conscience. No doubt Ionë's view of life was not the whole truth—she had always recognised that.

"Mother's quite as religious as you are," she said, in an al-

ered voice, which was part appealing, part encouraging to Mr. Pemberton to go on, but part also charged with doubt.

Hugo Pemberton gave a sudden start. He was a convinced positivist, as he thought that everyone knew. There flashed into his mind a picture that Mrs. Ayntree had once drawn of this girl's mother and of the primitive fetich-worship from the jaws of which his interlocutor had taken credit for rescuing the child. Was it only a fancy of Mrs. Ayntree's after all that she had done this?

"I'm afraid," he said, with a point of sarcasm, "that your—that a great many people would hardly recognise my religion to be one at all."

"How impossible it is to understand men!" was Kitty's lugubrious reflection.

The next moment her companion felt that he had been wanting to his principles. "Anyone who is sincere in their belief is deserving of respect," he said, sententiously. "It is people like Mrs. Hawthornethwaite, whose creed is a pure matter of convention, who do so much harm." But he was not speaking with conviction, and his words rang false. For the first time it flashed across the apostolic Hugh that the condition of perpetual controversy in which he lived had robbed his belief of most of its positive qualities.

Then he began to think of a certain Sophy Throgmorton, whom his sister, Lady Frances Playgrove, was always urging him to marry. Sophy Throgmorton was not beautiful, but she was refined (she belonged, as Lady Fanny would have said, "to our set"), and she had given up all her inherited opinions to adopt those of Mr. Pemberton. Lady Frances did not share her brother's views, but she admired him greatly, and was only the more keenly alive to the importance of his marrying some one "one could like."

Pemberton thought of these things and stilled the rather rapid beating of his heart. Certainly he had never in his life been alone with such a beautiful girl. But then she was only eighteen, and he was thirty-eight. "Perhaps I had better trust Frances's judgment in a question of this sort," he said within himself, accustomed to suppress his first inclinations and desires.

A chillness and alienation came over both; and now they first felt that they were left alone.

"Where did you say they had gone?" said Mr. Pemberton.

"Just down the hill to the waterfall, I think."

So they crossed the plateau and began descending the hill.

Over the brow the scene suddenly changed. They entered a great fir-wood, but a wood not like unto any other—as it were, a grove of death, in which the trees were shrouded by huge folds of grey lichen, covering the stems and enwrapping the limbs so that their proper verdure could hardly be seen. Soon on their side the top of the hill cut off the afternoon sunlight. The wood grew cold and monotonous like to some immeasurable long-abandoned church with moss-grown walls and pillars all intact; the everlasting sigh of the pine-trees breathed through it.

The way was very stony, and Kitty, for the sake of her ankle, had to walk with the utmost caution.

A dragon-fly rushed past them down the hill-side, so near to the ground that it looked as if it were falling down the height, bounding from side to side as it fell. Great white Alps were opposite them, gleaming under the sun's level rays, holding their heads high in air. Kitty noticed how a spider had spun his web from a branch to a branch across all the breadth of Mont Blanc.

"Have you hurt your foot?" Mr. Pemberton at last said, very sympathetically. His voice sounded strange.

"No; but my ankle—oh!" (she had given it a slight twist) —"isn't very strong. Will you stop one minute? . . . I'm all right now," she said almost immediately.

"But you'd better take my arm, I think, hadn't you?" said Hugo. And with some inward hesitation she took it.

And thereupon a thought, a sensation came over Kitty, which endowed all this solemnity with a special meaning. She was for the first time in her life, when she was of an age to understand its meaning, alone in the presence of the *man*, that unknown, mysterious work of God. Man in the abstract, not so much the actual Mr. Pemberton, man the other half of creation, the destined lover—he walked beside her, his arm she was actually holding; a tremendous thought. Bertie, the Bertie of her recollections, seemed commonplace beside this wondrous being. How was it possible that she had, earlier in the afternoon, treated this sublime creation with something like familiarity, had sought to put him at his ease—he, who now towered over her with a golden beard? She did not look up: Mr. Pemberton's head seemed to reach towards the clouds. It was not love that she felt, but something beyond all love, romance—the instinct of complete self-surrender—not of the body, but of the mind and soul.

They came out of the shadowy wood on to a grassy hill-side, whereon once more the sun's rays fell. The turf was soft as velvet, intermingled with wondrous green mosses, and peopled with innumerable flowers, campanula, bird's-foot-trefoil, grass of Parnassus, speedwell, short heads of clover and of scabious—here and there in watery places a line of forget-me-not—and smaller than most, more multitudinous than all, the inappreciable eyebright. Every colour was there, patches of purple, lilac, yellow, turquoise-blue, as on some magic carpet; and over it, thrown like a shuttle, a constant sight and sound of living things, butterflies of many colours, but the largest number of them of the colour of blue sulphur flames; there were the exquisite green grasshoppers, whose chorus grew sometimes to a long hiss, like the hiss of a serpent, and those still more wondrous beings, half grasshoppers half butterflies, who opened bright crimson wings and went by with a sound like a policeman's rattle heard from the end of the street.

"Those are the most curious creatures that you see," said Mr. Pemberton. "You'd think that those brilliant wings of theirs would betray them to any bird or creature that preyed upon them. But it's just the opposite. They are like a sort of policeman's lantern. They flash in your face and dazzle you; then they shut up, and the creature disappears in the grass like any other grasshopper."

Kitty awoke with a start from her day-dream. Nothing had happened. Here was she walking with Mr. Pemberton, and he was talking about Natural History. But the constant song of the grasshoppers, the flight of the butterflies, seemed to call for something else—for something which was to have happened and had not happened.

Hugo Pemberton felt a thrill of pleasure when he saw that they had not found their party, and then felt ashamed of himself for the feeling.

"I suspect we ought to go more to the left," he said, "to get to the waterfall. I see the stream up there."

For the first time Kitty realised that she had—that neither of them had—any clear notion of where they were to go. She had been trusting herself entirely to Mr. Pemberton's guidance.

They never found their party. Mrs. Churton had gone home for fear of a headache, forgetting all about Kitty; Mrs. Hawthornethwaite had no notion of making herself responsible for that Churton set—Kitty she supposed had gone back with the

walkers. After some trouble Hugo Pemberton got a mule; and he and Kitty returned alone quite in the dark when the second *table-d'hôte* bell had already sounded. Mrs. Hawthornethwaite looked at Kitty severely, as she came up to the terrace just as they were all trooping in; but Miss Budge nodded in a very knowing way and said, "Well, I hope *you've* had a good time, any way."

"What did you do?" said Mrs. Churton, crossly, to Kitty after dinner. "I heard Mrs. Hawthornethwaite saying to Miss Rowbotham when she knew I could hear, that I ought to look after you more; and that she blamed me quite as much as you. What Mrs. Hawthornethwaite thinks is a matter of no consequence to me," she added, with some inconsistency.

"You got lost, didn't you, with Mr. Pemberton," said the daughter, significantly.

"Oh, well, dear Hugo's as safe as a house," said Mr. Yeames Munn to her in a low tone.

"I don't believe any man is as safe as a house," she replied. "How safe is a house? Houses fall sometimes, don't they?"

"And men never."

"Because they're so low there's nowhere for them to fall to."

"It's just the other way with women. They're so high that they tumble down rather often, out of pure consideration for poor men."

"How do you know they tumble down rather often?"

"I've heard so, that's all."

The talk went on in the same vein, and Mrs. Churton did not like it. It would have done for Kensington; but she would have been sorry for Mrs. Hawthornethwaite to overhear. She gathered from the glances of Mrs. Hawthornethwaite's set at the other end of the salon that the Churton party were being discussed at that moment.

Mr. Pemberton hovered near. Mrs. Churton seized the opportunity of speaking about his relations.

"How is your sister, Lady Frances, Mr. Pemberton?" she said. "Is she better now than she used to be?"

"Not very much, I'm sorry to say; I've just heard from her. She wants me to go to Geneva and meet her there. Then I hope she will come here."

"That will be so nice. I met her at Lady Talboys' a great many years ago, and thought she was such a sweet person. She hadn't long been married then, not very long, I think. It was so very sad."

"Ah—that must have been at least seven years ago. It's six years since poor Playgrove died."

At the Hawthornethwaite end Mrs. Marjorie, an arrival of that evening and a friend of Miss Champernowne's, had just asked who that girl was with the lovely eyes.

"Yes," said the good-natured but scandal-loving Champernowne, "she has lovely eyes. But they are just the sort that are likely to get a girl into trouble. She's distinguished herself to-day by getting lost in a picnic party with Hugo Pemberton, that tall man over there; Lord Heatherbridge's son, you know, and . . ."

"I'm very sorry I went," said Mrs. Hawthornethwaite. "If I had known that Mr. Pemberton was coming I should not have gone. He has the most dreadful principles. My nephew's wife, Ida Grahame, is his niece, you know. He's a great trouble to poor old Lord Heatherbridge."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Smiles. "That makes it worse, of course. Do you mean that he's very wild?"

"I don't know. Perhaps not now. He's a middle-aged man, you see."

"He looks tame enough," said Mrs. Marjorie.

"My dear, they're always the worst," said Miss Champernowne.

"The fact is," said Mrs. Hawthornethwaite, "people think they can do what they like in an out-of-the-way place like this." She took up a book in order not to notice how her son Bertie was in his turn hovering within the Churton atmosphere.

"Who was that Frenchman who came—didn't he come with Mr. Churton?" said a lady who had not yet spoken.

"I believe his name is De—something," said Mrs. Smiles. "Desanges I think I heard him called."

"What! Was that Victor Desanges?" cried Miss Champernowne in excitement. Both Mrs. Hawthornethwaite and Mrs. Smiles looked up surprised, pained somewhat.

"I don't know what his Christian name is, I am sure," said the former, going back to her book.

For a third time that evening Kitty's little adventure was destined to be the subject of discussion, and so to be raised to more importance than it had in reality.

Crawfurd Tennant arrived late at Courmeyer's hotel. This inn is much more affected—was at any rate in those days—by

regular mountaineers and by single men than the Hôtel d'Angleterre. It had a café attached, and so was often a meeting-place for the younger male population even of various hotels.

Crawfurd had seen no one as yet. He was having his late supper. The great sense of *bien-être* was upon him which follows a day of exceptional fatigue. He ordered a bottle of the best wine which that part of the world produced, the strongest coffee, the finest liqueur, and was so absorbed in the enjoyment of these physical delights that he wanted no companionship. He knew that Munn and Desanges were in Les Preulx; probably he would go into the café presently to see if they were there, but there was no hurry.

Suddenly from out of the darkness and through the window came voices speaking English.

"Oh, yes," said one—evidently they had just sat down on some seats outside—"they all look like that, as if they were the most charming sylphs and undines. But inside they are mostly as selfish as Napoleon and as hard as nails."

"Oh, you don't want to know what women are inside"—it was Yeames Munn who spoke in his good-natured voice, at the back of which there always lurked a faint note of cruelty—"si elles sont bun à couchy avec—n'est-ce pas, M. Desanges?"

"Parfaitement," said Victor, who evidently at that moment had joined the other two.

Then there was an introduction between Mr. Hanchurch and M. Victor Desanges.

"Vous parliez du pique-nique d'aujourd'hui? . . . L'on doit avouer que c'est un bel homme que le ministre."

"Why," said Crawfurd to himself, "should Victor's voice have such a note of *ricanement*?" Only one thing he knew, jealousy—jealousy of success in love or literature—ever drew that accent from his friend.

"Quel ministre?" said Munn.

"Celui à la longue barbe blonde."

"Oh, il n'est pas ministre."

"That tall chap—Pemberton his name is, I heard," Hanchurch said.

"Yes; Hugo Pemberton. He is a kind of priest, certainly—a priest of humanity, as they call it," said Yeames Munn, with a laugh.

"Oh, yes, I've read some of his articles in the *Experiential* and those sort of reviews."

"Vraiment? Je le croyais ministre," said Desanges, enquir-

ingly, for he had not quite understood what the others said—"parsonne c'est à dire. Onli to see the ooay the yooung women came round 'im."

"Ah, yes," said Hanchurch. "That's just the way they surround a parson—you're quite right about that—when they are on the parson-hunt."

"C'est à dire," said Crawford, emerging from the light into the darkness, "que curé est féminin en Anglais." The opportunity of placing a *mot* made him break his resolution of not showing himself.

"Ah, très-bien, très-bien!" cried Desanges. "That is you, Tennant?" and Crawford shook hands with the others.

"Feminine; I wish they were feminine," said Hanchurch, who had perhaps some old grievance of his own.

"Or neuter—neutre," said Yeames Munn.

"C'est unique, au moins the ouay he went off with that little sylphide in the dark dress. Ma foi ça m'agaçait." Desanges drew a long breath, a sort of hissing sigh. "And the beautiful child. Her eyes they sing, they sing *l'amour*." He was embarked in a sort of ecstatic contemplation. Crawford himself suddenly felt his heart beat by sympathy or suspicion.

"What was that?" he said, in a sharp voice turning to Munn.

"Didn't see," said the other.

"You didn't see!" Victor started up and almost shrieked. "Not 'ow 'e took off ze yooung girl and they got lost togezer—an hour, two hours. Ils ont de la chance ces animaux de curés. But he was not, you say, *ça m'est égal*." Victor ground his teeth. Crawford felt sure he had turned white. "Why, in France a man must marry a girl—or she is his mistress. . . ."

"Oh, no one would think anything of what Pemberton did," said Munn.

"*Ma foi*," and again Victor spoke in a treble. "Is he not a man, then, the same as anozer? Are they *bêtes*, these English?" Crawford heard him mutter to himself.

"But who was the girl?" said Crawford, a sudden inspiration seizing him, and his voice shook.

"A little girl—an awfully pretty one, I must say."

"Yes, lovely," said Hanchurch.

"Staying with the Churtons."

"Not Kitty Maynard?"

"Yes, Kitty Maynard, of course; do you know her?" said Munn.

"Yes—oh, yes—she's very pretty, certainly—*Hugo avait de la chance*, as Victor says." Crawford used all an Englishman's power not to give himself away or to express any emotion. But Victor knew Tennant too well, and Crawford's jealousy struck fresh fire from his own.

Munn asked Crawford a question about his climbing.

"Well," he answered, "I've kept Peter Simond. I shall keep him another week. I think I shall have a shot at the Aiguille de Darien. Peter knows me and I know him." And the conversation turned upon mountaineering, and plans were told and made which recoiled upon Crawford afterwards. This evening he was not quite master of himself. Such a sudden recollection of Kitty's beauty, such a sudden furious jealousy of Pemberton, of Victor Desanges, of everybody, had come upon him that his first instinct was at any price to conceal his feelings.

Victor had no such instinct. He was walking up and down the gravel path puffing his cigarette and gazing up at the stars and at the white peaks below them which shone in the moonlight, though there was no moonlight in the valley. Once Crawford heard him murmur to himself—

Comment fais-tu les grands amours,
Petite ligne de la bouche?

And he spoke these lines of Sully Prudhomme in a tender voice which doubled their beauty.

Now, Victor Desanges was a married man.

CHAPTER XLIV.

As day after day Churton looked upon the beautiful face of his god-daughter and (in a sense) his ward, he was oppressed by a vague uneasiness. The face of his old friend seemed to be reflected to him across a great abysm of time. How thick they had once been! Ever since that evening when they chanced to meet at a smoking concert somewhere; Maynard,

who was still a medical student, in great spirits because some sketches of his, which were more than merely humorous, had been accepted for an illustrated journal. He had given himself rather the airs of an artist, not knowing who his neighbour was; but the professed artist, and older man, had been only pleased to find some one so ready to talk on the subjects which interested him. Thus their friendship began. That was in a hyperborean land which some call Bohemia, when the cares of the world and the temptations of riches and of poverty lay for the two far off in the future.

Churton, an excellent companion among men, was silent in his own family circle. He alone, perhaps, still felt keenly the loss of Bella, who had died more than a year ago. He had wished to, but had not yet got to know much of Kitty, albeit he was "Uncle Tom" to her, and she always looked bright and pleasant when she kissed him in the morning.

There were times when this vacation life weighed heavily upon the painter; and so, though he was too good an artist not to know that Swiss scenery was unattainable by paint and canvas, Churton always carried about with him, as a refuge, the materials of his craft. How would it be, he thought, one morning soon after the picnic, if he took Kitty with him that day and went out to paint? Now that Ionë was taken up with Yeames Munn, and that his wife never showed before *déjeuner*, Kitty, when the proposition was made to her that she should mount the mule that was to carry Mr. Churton's easel and canvas, beamed with delight in a way that was good to see. Thereupon another idea entered Churton's mind as a pendant to the first. How would it be if he had a shot at Kitty in the open air? As a matter of fact he did not often paint figures in the open air.

"I think I had better give you a lesson," he said to her, as he was watching the things made tight on the mule. "Your poor father's daughter ought to be able to paint. Did you ever try?"

"Oh, I've drawn an awful lot," Kitty replied, without any enthusiasm. "My master won't let me paint."

"Don't you like drawing?"

"I like the beginning. But it is so slow going on shading and shading."

"What sort of things do you do?"

"Oh, heads and things."

"And feet and arms and legs—all in bits, eh?"

"Yes," Kitty nodded and smiled from her high seat on the mule's back, "at least generally."

"I know the sort of thing," said Churton, chuckling. "Bread it out a *little* more—just there," and he made a minute motion with his finger and thumb.

"Yes," said Kitty, laughing her clear, bright, childish laugh from above him, "that's just the way he goes."

"Dear me! I thought that sort of thing was given up, even in South Kensington Schools of Art."

"Bon jour, mademoiselle; bon jour, monsieur," said Victor Desanges, coming round the corner from the Hôtel de France. "You are very matinal; you are going to make an ascension, no?" He had bowed very elaborately, and then had shaken hands with both Churton and Kitty; now he kept his beautiful blue eyes fixed on Kitty's face. They were beautiful eyes, much the same colour as Kitty's own, and with eyebrows as finely pencilled as hers.

"No; we are going painting, Kitty and I," said Churton, heartily.

"Ah!"

The painter and his god-daughter set off; when they reached the corner of the street Kitty looked round, and "that queer Frenchman" was still standing in the same attitude looking after them. It was funny of him to come up and shake hands with them in that way; for, as a matter of fact, he had never been presented to Kitty.

They stopped at a beautiful place where a brook from the mountains made a perpetual gurgling as it ran over the polished stones, and where, out of the velvet grass, moss-covered boulders arched their broad backs; while all about lay the shadows and the deep warm scent of pine-trees alternating with birch and beech. In front, not far off, rushed the glacier river. On the other side of it was a fruitful plain sown with wheat, with oats which were still green in part, with bright patches of clover and more sombre flax. Behind, blue-green, rose the immense mountain-side.

"Well, now, do you think you would really like to try your hand?" Churton said.

"Oh, yes, I should, if you will show me how."

"Oh, yes," Kitty said to herself, with a new delight and with an immeasurable hope, "now I'm going to learn."

She had always been ashamed of herself for her idleness. But there had for ever seemed to Kitty to be a leaden hand

which kept her back from making any real progress. It was a sort of spell. In face of art and of all painting she had felt as a man might feel who looks into a magic mirror, sees himself walking in some garden of paradise, meeting there some beautiful maiden, and then, to get the full enjoyment of what he sees, tries himself to enter the garden, when—crack!—the mirror is broken and all disappears. Kitty had never seemed to get any nearer to entering the garden of accomplished work either under her father's teaching or at the Norwich school. But something told her that it was not wholly her fault nor her want of capacity; that somewhere this Paradise lay in wait for her if she could light upon it.

And this time, all of a sudden—that is, since they had started on their expedition—an ineffable hope had arisen in her, that the spell which had kept her back was really nothing but the want of right teaching. Yet with the hope came a dread as infinite. If she were to fail once more! When, therefore, she set herself down to make a drawing as Churton told her to do, she was all of a tremble. She would never have supposed, half an hour ago, that anything could have excited her so much or seemed of such mighty importance.

"The French have a way," Churton said, when she had done the drawing, "of just washing in the leading colours with turps—as if it were a water-colour, you know. It's not my way. But you might . . ."

"What is turps—a paint?" said Kitty.

"No, no; turpentine. You mix it with your colour and then just wash in . . ."

"But how do you mean wash in?"

"Why, just as you do with water-colour . . ."

"But I've never painted in water-colour," said Kitty, her mouth falling.

"Oh, well, look here!" answered Churton, rather impatiently. He was only waiting to get Kitty settled at her work to draw her in for his own picture. Her painting attitude, if he could get her fairly steady in it, would be much prettier than a reading one; but above all things he must get her natural, not posed.

The painter leaned over Kitty, dipped her brush in the turpentine, and next, like a flash of lightning as it seemed to her, he rubbed it in one or two colours, and then with it daubed all the lower half of her picture.

"There, that's the grass in the foreground," he said, "and,"

taking another brush and with some more lightning daubs, "that's the trees on the left; do you see now? Leave the very bright tones till you use your white."

"Oh, what *does* he mean by that?" said Kitty to herself.

"Look here"—he filled a third brush with colour—"this'll give you the tone of the background. You must use that hill simply as a background of colour, you understand. Don't attempt any details with that. Now, you see, don't you?" and he gave the brush to his pupil.

Churton went back to his own canvas and began drawing in Kitty's face, but almost directly she turned to him again: "I don't understand how to do it a *bit*." There were tears in her voice as she spoke. Were, after all, these wild hopes going to turn out mere illusions. What did these washes of colour mean? What did they lead to?

Churton had to come and look at her work. It was everything to get her interested in what she did; so he forebore to criticise.

"Well, now," he said, as he stood over her, "you wash your brushes of all that stuff and begin to work in the regular way. Try and mix your colour to represent exactly the thing you see. You shouldn't have put in the cornfield at all in the wash, nor the river: they are nearly white. The stream you have got much too blue: it's drab."

"But I don't understand, and you *won't* show me," said Kitty, pettishly. "Why am I not to put in the cornfield at all?"

"At all; of course you put it in now. Now you put on like an oil-painting—in the regular way."

"Oh, what is the regular way? what do you mean?" Kitty almost sobbed as she spoke.

Churton began to laugh, but checked himself from good nature. "The regular way is just mixing the colours with your brush on the palette as they are."

To show, he filled her brush with colour. "Try that for this tree-trunk on the left," he said, "and then do the other things in the same way. Try what you can do. I can't stand over you all the time, any way. Of course you can't expect to do very well the first time. But you'll never get on if you don't try for yourself." Then he went back to his own drawing.

Kitty began daubing on her colour listlessly. She couldn't ask any more help. Yet she didn't understand; she should never do it. There was something which had not been ex-

plained to her. Once more the leaden hand descended. Howbeit, for once in her life she made a violent effort of will to drive back despair and to concentrate her energies on what she was about. "After all," she said, "here are the colours. If Uncle Tom can put them on to look like the things one sees, there must be a way.

"I see!"—a cloud seemed to fall from her vision and an inspiration, as if direct from heaven, entered her mind. She had been thinking of the wood of the tree-trunks as solid wood, of the water as flowing liquid, of the sunlight itself as something that she must try to paint. But the sudden inspiration said, "These things that you see are all colours—nothing more—those things on your palette are colours likewise. By combination they can be made to imitate everything."

The thought came all in a moment and as by a voice from on high. Kitty was so astonished at the force of the revelation that she fell a-trembling once more, so that it was not possible, at the moment, to touch her picture. Was it really true that she had discovered the great secret of painting? But if so, what did people mean—what had her father meant in old days, when he talked about this or that painter being able to paint sunlight? A chill doubt swept over her. No: no matter; she had found out the secret. She saw it all now. In place of fear she only felt the excitement of trial and the certainty of success. The certainty, not to-day, perhaps, nor to-morrow, but some day. Only to concentrate all her thoughts on that one point: to see the colours before her and to copy them on canvas; to shut out every other thought. It must be possible.

As she awoke to this new hope, Kitty awoke likewise to the exquisite physical pleasure which went along with her work. The working of the brush through the soft resisting paint; the inexpressible sensation as it passed oilily over the surface of her picture: every process was pure rapture and full of the strangest discoveries. What she had formerly called brown was, now that she concentrated her mind upon it, in reality almost pink, and the sides of the tree-trunks under the shadows of the leaves were an absolute purple. The leaves in shadow were not green but blue, some indigo, but some quite a light blue. (Kitty knew as yet none of the names of the colours—Churton having squeezed out what he knew she would want and then taken his tubes away.)

She found she could at will pass from the common world, in which every tree-trunk was brown, all the fir-needles green, and

the grass light green, to a new world of art in which these things had infinite varieties of colour, brown and pink and purple, and green and blue and yellow. And this effort of will, this concentration of all herself in her eyes, was an effort which brought rapture with it and an inexpressible sense of power and of taking possession. Was there not something more in it even than that? Might not—might not—Kitty felt this rather than thought—the shutting the door upon reflection become a thing of habit, and so the haunting ghosts of her mother's views of things, which never left her now, be laid for once and ever? Yes, surely there were endless possibilities; a new and infinite power and infinite freedom opening before her. While she worked, she was still shaken with excitement, and the colour burnt in her cheeks. If the night had suddenly come she would not have been surprised, so oblivious was she to the passing of time.

But now her godfather gave the signal to go home: "We shall have to get back to *déjeuner*, and the light is changing so much it is no use going on, anyhow. I'll take your canvas and stick it against mine with pins. You are doing better now," he said, as he glanced at Kitty's work. Then he carried it off to his own picture.

And that was all! She had been performing a miracle. Out of mere paint and canvas she had created an image of a part of the world; and Uncle Tom only said, "Yes, you are doing it better now."

Ionë and Yeames Munn were the first of the party whom they encountered. This was just as they were entering *Les Preulx*. The narrow street was more crowded than ever. Ionë explained that there had just come some arrivals of importance to the *Hôtel de France*. There were three carriages of them, and a good many people who looked like servants. And then she brought out of her pocket a telegram for her father.

"How nice she looks!" thought Kitty to herself, as she looked down on Ionë Churton brandishing her staff in one hand, the other thrust into the pocket of her jacket. Her skirts were short, and she wore neat, strong boots and gaiters.

"Dear, dear!" Churton ejaculated in a shocked voice. But he spoke for himself; none of the younger people paid any attention to him.

Yeames Munn came to help Kitty from her mule, and was rather long over the operation. Perhaps that was because his

short-sightedness obliged him to come so close. He put his hand round Kitty's ankle as he was helping her to alight. And that too seemed pleasant to Kitty, not otherwise, in her curious exaltation and high spirits. On the terrace Crawford joined the party, and they all went in to lunch together.

"Are you going to *déjeuner* with us, Mr. Tennant?" Ionë asked.

"Unless you have any objection. Have *you* any objection?" Crawford emphasized his question by turning to Kitty.

And both the girls said, "Oh, no," in much the same voice. "There will be enough for us all, I dare say," Kitty added, with the suggestion of a toss of the head in Ionë's manner. She felt that she was speaking with the voice of Ionë Churton.

"Oh, that's all you think of it," said Crawford Tennant, coming to Kitty's side.

"Well, I'm most awfully hungry."

"What have you been doing?"

"Painting."

"No, really? I didn't know you painted, but, of course, you ought to."

"I don't—*really*. I only pretend to."

"And the picture was on the mule. What an idiot I was not to look!"

"You would have been tremendously edified."

"Paint me a landscape. Would you like a commission? I will get you one if you like."

"Who from?"

"From somebody I know."

"Why don't you come here, Mr. Tennant?" said Ionë from the other side of the table.

"I tried to-day. They'd got no vacancy."

"Well, M. Desanges is coming here."

"*The devil!*" Crawford said under his breath. He had to make a huge effort to keep his self-control.

"Is he? How did he manage it?"

"He asked, I suppose," said Kitty.

"She's coming out to-day," Crawford said to himself. "What a *fool* I am to have settled to make that climb!" and out loud, "I shouldn't wonder. There's nothing like asking, is there? Do you admire Victor very much, Miss Maynard?"

"I think he's just lovely," said Miss Budge.

"Of course he is," said Ionë, in the face of her lover.

"But he's married, you know," said Yeames Munn.

"Well, I don't care if he is. I did not say I wanted to marry him, did I?"

"But you might want to without saying it."

"Of course I might." To which Yeames Munn whispered something which was not heard by the rest of the company.

And thus in the lightest of chaff the afternoon wore on. Victor joined the party in the garden after lunch, and told them who were the new arrivals at his hotel. The Duke and Duchess of Cordillac and a M. de la Souvraye.

Then he turned to Kitty. "You have the air fatigued," he said in his melodious voice. Crawford laughed, and Kitty did so too from contagion; but she was not displeased by Victor's look of tender solicitude.

The party broke up, and Kitty went to her room. Already the exultation of her triumph was falling from her, and in its place was arising a sense of greater weakness than before. She knew that she had no real self in the midst of all these crowds; that she had voluntarily partitioned her soul, and that a fragment of her was possessed by each person—and they were many—who thought much about her. For this is the penalty of self-consciousness, that through it we cease to possess our own souls, cease in fact to *be*.

To the snows opposite the first warning of evening change crept up. Soon they flushed crimson like a maiden and then turned grey as death; while all about the valley were picketed the advance-guard, the misty troops of night.

CHAPTER XLV.

VICTOR DESANGES and the Duchesse de Cordillac were friends of very long standing. They had once, that is, been something more than friends, perhaps were so still, who knows? For though Yvonne de Cordillac confessed to forty-eight years, and that was ten years more than Victor confessed to, and though Yvonne's enemies confessed to fifty-four on her behalf, she had still the remains of beauty and great distinction. But she was also a philosopher. She had earned Victor's gratitude ere this by helping him in other *affaires*. What line would she take now?

That was the question which Victor revolved in his mind when he went that evening to pay his respects to the Cordillacs; went not without a sense of guilt, because he ought to have gone some days ago to meet them at Ste. Severine. He had come to Les Preulx for one night just to meet Tennant, and now he had been there three days; and it was his non-appearance that had brought Yvonne from Ste. Severine to Les Preulx, as he well knew.

"Come, what have you got this time," said the Duchess of Cordillac, with a touch of severity.

Victor took her hand, kissed it and held it, and looked into her face with his bewitching blue eyes. His face was very pale. He looked tender and beauteous, but yet fully his—his thirty-eight years.

"My friend, you will help me," he said, plaintively. "I know it is a folly. But, but . . ."

"But the greatest follies pass the soonest."

"No: that is, perhaps—sometimes—if they are gratified;" and his eyes again looked straight into hers.

"My faith! you are too impudent."

"Impudent? Ah! no, indeed! I am too much beaten down for that."

"Well, you can relieve your feelings by telling me, at all events."

"You will only laugh."

"*Tant mieux*: so will you, if I do."

Victor laughed as it was, and then sighed. "You cannot understand until you have seen her . . ."

"Who is her?"

"An English miss, a . . ."

"A miss! *Pardi!*—at your age, my friend—*tartines* and a deal board! You must be *toqué*," and unconsciously Yvonne de Cordillac made a motion which brought into relief her well-developed person.

Victor looked at her as she desired to be looked at; but he shook his head.

"I know—I could not have believed it possible; but if you once saw her eyes . . ."

"Her eyes!" said Yvonne, with great contempt.

"It is not as if she ate nothing but *tartines*. I know, I am almost sure . . . Ah! it is that that tortures me!"

"Oh! *connu*. I see a good deal of the English mees when

I am over there." (The Cordillacs were frequent visitors at Stowe House.) "Of course, I know that she is often as *canaille* as you like. But, my faith! she is not for a Frenchman nor any man of taste. My dear, for a figure! You should see them when they bathe."

"Ah!" said Victor, with a shudder and a little cry, "that is the worst. I am as you say, I am not myself. And she, she is a thing of pure spirit, not of flesh and blood."

"Ah! ça . . . ?"

"No. You cannot understand; a spirit, and yet sinning. It is the most fearful anguish to me. Yesterday it was with a cleric, a parsonne, *grand bel homme* with a great blond beard. To-day—oh, Yvonne! you must help me—to-day it is with the old painter, her uncle."

"What old painter?"

"I have not told you yet." Victor positively dashed his hand across his eyes as he spoke. "There is a painter—well known in England—you will know . . ." But here Victor's voice failed him. He clasped Yvonne's hand convulsively.

She, too, was a little affected; but she laughed through the tears which came into her eyes.

"My poor friend!"

"I make myself seem ridiculous to her, I know I do. And there is a third, my friend Ténant."

"He her lover, too? *Sapristi!*"

"No, no, he certainly not. Not yet; at least so I think; I cannot be sure. Oh, Yvonne! I cannot think. No, no, not yet but he will be . . ."

"*Allez*; she is for all the world."

"Ah, no, not really, not in the heart. You cannot understand until you have seen her."

"Oh! I mean to see her."

"*Chère amie*, you must not laugh at me." Victor leant his head against Yvonne's shoulder. "Nothing, nothing can destroy our friendship."

"Child!"

"Is La Souvraye here?" said Victor, suddenly.

"Is that meant to be a thrust?" said the duchess, contemptuously.

("No, on my honour. I never thought of such a thing." It was Victor's first inclination to say that.) But he never followed his first inclinations when he was dealing with women.

"Je ne l'aime pas," he said, in a tone of gloom which quite deceived his companion.

Yvonne laughed. "Silly child," she said. "You will never be anything but a child that one spoils."

Victor was obliged to put that restraint upon himself, but when he was alone the tortures of love—if you call it love—and a very real jealousy came upon him with hundred-fold insistence.

One thing he had gleaned from his talk with the duchess, that she confirmed his opinion of the lightness of English girls. Was it a pleasure, or only a greater agony to have his opinion strengthened? If it had not been for the Pemberton escapade Victor would probably never have brooded, as he now did, over Kitty's loveliness; and it is equally certain that, if she had been an ordinary girl, the Hugo Pemberton adventure would have made no impression upon him. He would have interpreted it in the worst sense; but he would have said that it was no more than they were always doing.

But now . . .

No more peace in this world seemed possible to Victor—unless—until . . .

His head was bursting with conflicting thoughts and surmises. What had the tall cleric . . . he always called Pemberton "that cleric," or "that parsonne," to himself—why had he suddenly disappeared? The cleric was staying in the same hotel. Oh, torture! (Ah! he would be able to come to that hotel in two days. What would Yvonne say to that?) Had Kitty's guardian warned him off? If so, why? For the sake of her good name or—to keep her to himself.

O mon Dieu, mon Dieu, ô Marie, aie pitié de moi!

This last idea had but that morning leapt into Victor's mind, after he had seen "Kitti" and her guardian setting out for the wood where they had spent the whole forenoon; and after Kitti returned, what a look she had in her eyes! Victor thought he knew that look! It was too much, too much! It was more than he could bear.

*"Comment fais-tu les grands amours,
Petite ligne de la bouche?"*

Experienced lover as Victor was, and middle-aged man, he dashed his head against the wall, as he thought over all these things, and buried his face in his pillow and sobbed.

On his side, while undressing, Crawford Tennant cursed himself a thousand times for a most infernal fool, as he recognised how his English instinct for concealing his feelings and letting nothing alter his way of life had put him at a disadvantage beside Victor, who knew no scruples of that kind. If he were to give up the ascent of the Aiguille de Darien, and spend all his time hanging about the skirts of the women, people would think he had gone cracked. "What the hell does it matter what they think?" said Crawford. But they would say he funk'd; the climb was no joke. And what would Kitty think of him if she heard that? No: he must stick to it, Crawford supposed, gloomily; but what might not happen in those two days? "What cursed blackguards the French are!" he said to himself in an unwonted access of British virtue.

In all passions which depend mostly on the senses the power of suggestion is almost infinite. Crawford knew instinctively—that is, by watching the looks of his friend—what Victor thought about Kitty Maynard, what he desired, what he might dare much to bring about; and Victor's thoughts reacted upon Tennant, who had no enthusiastic belief in the purity of English matrons or maids. "No girl," he said to himself, pausing between every movement as he unlaced his boot—"no girl with such eyes as hers can be invulnerable. That beast Desanges knows that as well as I do. Surely no Englishwoman could care for such a barber's block; but that brute would stick at nothing. You can never be sure either. He can look infernally sentimental. What blackguards Frenchmen are!" he said, again. "They don't care whom they ruin for a moment's gratification." (This was the first time, since he had been a boy, that Crawford Tennant had criticised the low standard of French morals.) "He can look infernally sentimental. He understands women in a way too—I ought to tell Churton he's not a proper chap to know. But then I introduced him to them; and he's known all Churton's girls. By Jove, I should like to provoke him: I've a good mind to; that would be a way out of it.

"Then he would not stick at nothing, he'd stick at me," Crawford said, as he blew out his light. And this tiny joke made him feel a little happier; so that he soon fell asleep.

Thus it was that all through the light talk and chatter of the day Kitty unknowingly had moved like a hare who is watched by two dogs, who only do not spring upon their prey because they are even more jealous of one another than eager for their

Neither could Kitty guess this, nor any of her own-
ings, not Mr. Churton (who had, in truth, been chiefly
pied by the telegram from a dying friend and colleague in
land and his preparations to leave his party for a few days
rder to see the dying man), nor Mrs. Churton, nor Ionë, nor
Yeames Munn, nor any of the other guests who had sat
that afternoon on the terrace of the Hôtel d'Angleterre.
or was a picturesque and most distinguished Frenchman,
ing more; Crawford a most desirable addition to their
ty. Even Mrs. Hawthornethwaite preferred Crawford
nant to Hugo Pemberton.

arely there is nothing in life stranger and more terrifying
the sight, which may be beheld sometimes in society, when
commonplace conventional talk, the commonplace polite-
es of life—the handing of a coffee-cup or the bringing of
otstool—cover the most brutal desires and an almost mur-
us jealousy. Once or twice, perhaps, in a flash, these feel-
peep out, for those who have eyes to see.

Crawford and Victor still affected to be friends. They
r spoke of Kitty to each other, and that to each was a
of what the other thought and felt.

CHAPTER XLVI.

ALTHOUGH the Cordillacs and M. le Vicomte de la Souvraye
people of interest to all the title-loving English in Les
lx, there was only one of the party at the Hôtel d'Angle-
who might boast of attracting the special attention of
duchess: this person was Kitty Maynard. Yvonne de
lillac noticed her whenever they met; paid Mrs. Churton
pliments on her looks in a loud voice, which could be heard
over Les Preulx; and on the third day of their stay Kitty
invited to spend the evening in the Cordillacs' rooms at
hotel on the other side of the road.

was very queer, Kitty thought, sitting there, having com-
ents paid her which, of course, she did not understand,
ss they were interpreted either by the duchess, by M.
nges, or by another Frenchwoman, Madame Prévost by
e, and questions asked. Sometimes she found it hard
ugh to understand her interpreters; but she did her ut-

most, and had enough tact to show no doubts. Amid so many strangers she felt that Victor was quite an old friend. Though he had been at Les Preulx less than a week, and she had only known him for four days, he had become a familiar personality; he was no longer only "that queer Frenchman," and she had grown secretly rather to like his sentimental looks and soft, deferential ways: his presence now prevented her from feeling too shy. Victor's position in this company revealed to Kitty for the first time what a great man he was among his compatriots. Though other people were often interrupted in their talk, he never was. The strange girl noticed how, in this society, instead of all the men being dispersed and talking each to the lady beside him, though they stood in different parts of the room, they seemed to keep up a fire of questions or remarks and replies to one another across the floor; the most part of the ladies did little else but listen or throw in a word or a laugh from time to time, though some of them, notably the duchess, bore a fair share in the general talk.

Then one man would, as it were, take the floor—M. Desanges did this more frequently than anyone else—and hold forth in quite a little speech, which provoked laughter or cries of "*Très-bien!*" from the people round, and sometimes from the ladies shriller cries of "*Ah, mais non, par exemple!*" Either the duchess or Madame Prévost, who spoke English better than anyone else, or M. Desanges turned frequently to make a remark to Miss Maynard, which was meant to keep her in the current of the talk; but Kitty did not attempt to follow its general drift.

Now there was a change. One man with hair and moustache of a curious dull black took from his pocket two pieces of paper. They had two drawings upon them of a certain resemblance, one much rougher than the other. These drawings were handed round; and the remarks "*Mais, oui,*" "*Mais, enfin, c'est bien curieux,*" "*Évidemment,*" passed from mouth to mouth.

It was M. de la Souvraye who brought the papers to Kitty and for the first time hazarded a sentence in English. "Doo—yu—beeleaf—een—eet," he articulated slowly, showing all his small white teeth as he smiled.

"In what?" said Kitty.

"In—ze—óccult—sings: een—speerit—eesm."

"Oh, I've heard of it," said Kitty.

"Onli heard of it?" said the duchess in more fluent English and with but slight trace of an accent.

Then an old gentleman spoke in French, and La Souvraye replied. A third cried upon the scent, then half a dozen all at once; until, finally, the first speaker in this group raised his voice above all the others and shook his clenched fists by his side as he vociferated—

“C'est un phénomène purement physiologique—psychophysiologique.” He seemed to be pleased with the last phrase, and repeated it several times, and this impressed it upon Kitty's memory.

Presently, as the outcome of further talk, a man and a woman retired into the adjoining room, and the door was shut. It seemed odd to Kitty; for this adjoining room, though it had remained open all the evening for the reception of visitors, was, in fact, a bedroom. The woman came back with her eyes bandaged; two other men came forward to hold her by the hand.

“Oh, yes,” said Kitty, turning eagerly to the duchess and delighted to have penetrated the subject of conversation, “I've seen that done; it's thought-reading.”

“Pste!” exclaimed the irascible old gentleman on the other side. But the duchess seized the hand which Kitty had half held out to her and kept it as she said—

“Ah, you know yourself in that?”

Kitty did not answer, for fear of disturbing the ceremony. Presently, as in duty bound, the lady found the missing needle, her bandage was removed, and there was a universal clapping of hands.

“Now,” said the duchess presently, “Miss Ménard must try. I am sure one so *spirituelle* must be clever at spiritism.”

Victor's heart almost stopped beating as he stood with Kitty in the inner room. He seemed to the girl to take an infinite time in tying the bandage round her eyes. And when he had done this, she felt his breath so near her cheek that she suddenly turned her head away.

“Ah!” breathed from Victor in a gentle sigh as if it came out of the air: and Kitty felt a weird and secret compunction in her soul.

At a word from Yvonne de Cordillac, Victor Desanges and M. de la Souvraye, instead of taking “Miss Ménard's” hands, encircled her neck with their fingers and reposed the others lightly on her chest bone. Was this an arrangement by design? Victor, whose hands were trembling with emotion, felt a sudden

shock, such as a plunge into cold water gives to heated flesh, as he touched Kitty's hard chest, and he remembered Yvonne's saying, "*Tartines* and a deal board." For a moment his passion crouched back upon itself, but the next, in obedience to his will, it made a bound forward. He would not be robbed of his prey (to himself he said "his love") by Yvonne or any tricks of hers. He glanced at Kitty's hair and at the tint of her cheek and felt himself transported above the empire of the flesh. How he hated that La Souvraye on the other side who was doing what he was doing!

The English girl moved for a few paces in the direction she was expected to take. All eyes were fixed upon her bandaged face; one lady got out of her way with the motion of a person playing blind-man's-buff. But suddenly Kitty stopped quite still. There was a pause in the company. Then presently people began to talk in a low voice. At last, on a suggestion of someone near him, La Souvraye spoke to Kitty. "Yu—can—note—guesse?" he asked, in his deliberate tones; no answer came. "Must take it off?" he said, interrogatively, to Victor; and, though the latter made no reply, the bandage was removed. Then it was seen that Kitty was fixed there, staring straight in front of her, but with no speculation in her eyes.

She remembered the putting on of the bandage, remembered coming out from the inner room; had felt the two pairs of hands joining around her neck. Almost from that moment she lost consciousness of the outer world. A wave of flame seemed to pass through her, filling her with hope and dread. Then she awoke to find herself in an unknown world. It was very cold. Stars of unspeakable brightness shone in the purple sky. And surely they shone upon snow; not close at hand, but up thither on the hills; and below the snow were dark patches. But near at hand everything seemed bare. She heard her father murmuring once more, as he had murmured on his death-bed, "A wintry night, and snow on the mountain-tops." Yet the being whom she knew that she was near was not her father: it was Bertie Vanlennert. Suddenly, from point to point of the hill-tops, as meteors out of nothingness, great beacons flashed into the world throttling the night.

"Ah, c'est bien drôle; elle a été vraiment hypnotisée?" "Mademoiselle ne se trouve pas mal?" said several French people around Kitty, forgetting themselves in their excitement.

"These experiments are not always safe," said one old man, the same who had vociferated the phrase "psycho physiologique."
"Non : ne faut pas continuer," said Yvonne de Cordillac, who was looking narrowly at Victor and saw that he too looked dazed and partly stupefied. With many caresses she took possession of Kitty and made her sit down by her side.

The latter felt nothing but a strange coldness outwardly and a strange fire within. Now, however, she thought she ought to be going home.

When Kitty was ready to go, she was within earshot but not within comprehension of a dialogue which passed between Victor Desanges and the Duchess of Cordillac.

"Non je ne le veux pas," said the latter.

"Mais puisqu'il faut m'en aller aussi."

"Going ; where are you going ?"

"But across the road to my hotel."

"You are not here ?" Yvonne almost shrieked.

"No," said Victor, keeping his eyes fixed upon hers.

"C'est trop ; you shall not go with her."

"Pourquoi pas ?" said Victor, gloomily. "You permit me, mademoiselle, to accompany you across the road ?"

"Oh, thank you," Kitty began, hesitating. "Oh, I don't think . . ."

"I, too, go now to the Hôtel d'Angleterre."

"Oh, all right ; oh, thank you," said Kitty, to all seeming fully restored to her power of speech. "Thank you very much, duchess ; good-night," and she shook hands in quite an unembarrassed way.

But her mind began once more to wander from the present world when she got outside ; until she heard a deep sigh beside her.

"Ah—h !" sighed Victor, once more. "How you are beautiful, mademoiselle !"

Kitty was going to laugh. But when she turned and looked on Victor her laughter died down. He looked so weird in the moonlight, like some beautiful spirit lit up by a demon's eyes. He bent the eyes upon her : she tried to withdraw hers but could not. Suddenly Victor seized her hand and covered it with kisses. It all seemed ridiculous, and yet so unearthly that for a moment Kitty thought she had sunk back into the region of dreams. She had a vague curiosity, a vague expectation ; she was not sure but that she might see again the beacon-fires,

and find that it was Bertie who was by her side. Had he put his arm round her waist?

"'Cré nom d'un nom!'" Victor ground the words between his teeth. There came a clatter of mules round the corner. Kitty started and shuddered slightly; they were standing just at the gate of the Hôtel d'Angleterre. She felt that it needed a great effort to walk through it.

"Qui va la?" was the last thing she heard.

The party which came out of the shadows consisted of Crawford Tennant, Hanchurch, and their guides. Though it had not been known when Kitty left her hotel, the party which ascended the Aiguille de Darien had met with an accident. Hanchurch had slipped into a crevasse and put out his ankle upon an ice boulder within it. Afterwards he had been carried down to the Châlet du Point Noir, and a guide had been sent for mules. Crawford Tennant rode down with him. It was he who called out, *Qui va la?*

But when Victor answered, Crawford felt he had known already: the marrow froze in his bones and his teeth chattered; for that other woman's figure which had disappeared from under the gate lamp into the shade of the acacias, was not that as certainly Kitty Maynard?

Victor's surly reply would have been evidence enough. Crawford chose to ignore the manner of his friend, and he contrived to detain the Frenchman for a full minute.

"What are you doing in there?" he asked, trying to give a tone of *bonhomie* to his voice.

"What am I doing? why, going to bed—what else?"

"But you do not sleep there in the Hôtel d'Angleterre?"

"Si—bon soir," was all Victor answered. Crawford's heart stopped beating.

"Do you mean you are not at the Hôtel de France?" Crawford had alighted; he came in front of Victor and he caught his breath as he spoke.

"Ah, no!" Victor spoke in a much cooler tone now that he was obliged to stop, and his eyes glittered in an evil way. "It is true, *en effet* I was there. But my rooms were promised and they turned me out."

"Turned you out! I've never heard of such a thing!" Tennant's voice trembled slightly. He remembered that Ioné Churton had told him that Victor was coming to their hotel. But for him to be found in the act of entering it in company with Kitty Maynard, while Crawford was still at

Courmeyer's, this seemed such a monstrous offence that the Englishman longed to fasten a quarrel on Victor for this thing alone.

"Unheard of, was it not?" said Victor, with a shrug. He did not even act displeasure. "Now I am fatigued. Bon sommeil." And Crawford saw his form retreating in its turn among the trees.

"Ah, God!" Victor muttered to himself, as he entered the hotel garden, "will she linger a moment in the garden? If so, I have won her for ever, for ever. O Marie, donne-moi ça," he prayed, fervently. "If he follows me, I'll. . . ." He turned fiercely round, to find Crawford Tennant behind him.

"Won't you come to have a smoke with me?" said the Englishman. It was now his turn to be bland; but his teeth were set.

"Non, merci; je ne veux pas, je vais me coucher." And Victor, without any ceremony, turned his back and walked away.

But there was no form of Kitty Maynard to be found in the dark garden, though Victor traversed every alley of it before entering the *dépendance*. "That *sacré beast*," he ground his teeth; "he has spoilt everything. And to think, ah me! to think I might have been close to—Ah, no; I will win her this time. When I held her she did not draw away. Enfin: I cannot wait and wait. It will kill me. Faut tout oser. If one is to die it is better to die for something: to die!—Bêtise!—what is there to fear? Yvonne will be furious, of course; my compatriots will laugh. That imbecile Ténant he will provoke me perhaps: tant mieux. What is that to me? We are in France, my friend Ténant. Ma petite Kitti, we are in France. You must conform yourself to our ways, dear, dear one; and our ways are the ways of love. Ah! divine enfant, que je t'apprenne la plus belle des sciences; laisse-moi t'en donner les si douces leçons. Ah, oui, plus de reculement possible; je ne peux plus, et puis je ne veux plus, attendre. Je suis à la fin; allez; du courage. We shall win." But though he said *du courage* over and over to himself, Victor was trembling in every limb, as he half sat, half lay upon his bed and as the minutes passed by.

"Not in the *dépendance*, oh, God, not in the *dépendance*," Crawford said to himself in an agony, as he watched Victor's form disappearing from the moonlight. "What an utter fool

I was not to wring his neck while I had him here, and have done with it!" Crawford's face was white to the lips. The strange and awful drama of jealousy was being carried to its highest point between these two, and Tennant felt that murder would have been nothing to him at that moment.

What was he to do? He was foot-sore and tired to death. But as soon as he had reached the door of his own hotel he saw that there was no possibility of rest for him there,—out of reach, out of sound of the *dépendance* to the Hôtel d'Angleterre, whither Victor's steps had certainly turned and whither he thought Kitty Maynard's had preceded him. (Or was she really waiting for him in the garden? That too was possible. He had been away two days—curse him for a fool! What might not have happened in those two accursed days?) No; to be out of sight and sound of the garden and *dépendance* was more than he could endure.

The garden of the Hôtel d'Angleterre lay on both sides of the Nièvre, the glacier stream which flowed down the valley of Les Preulx; but the main part was on the farther side, and at the end of this garden, as far as possible from the principal building of the hotel, lay the *dépendance*, which lay a few yards back from the white road; the garden-gate giving upon this road was open in the daytime, but closed at night. Courmeyer's hotel, at which Crawford was staying, opened upon the same white road a little lower down.

Along this road Crawford now took his way. In wonderful fashion the moonlight lay across it; every pebble, every tiny ridge, was marked on its white face, as it stretched between the hedge-shadow upon one side and a wood on the other. To Crawford it seemed fraught with horror and like the face of a corpse seen between the blackness of its coffin's sides. Now the supreme moment had come (so he deemed), he realised as perhaps hardly in his life before, how the passion for this child had taken hold of him and eaten into his very bones—now that perhaps at this very moment she was being snatched from him for ever. Oh, God! how could he have gone on talking formal talk and making customary plans when this mighty thing was at stake! He shivered in the keen night air as he walked, now hurrying forward and then again lingering, puffing hard at his pipe, but never tasting it.

For even now he could not tell what to do. Had he not lost the golden moment when he was talking with Victor in the gateway? Talking with his enemy at the gate, as he said

himself. Had not the other shown more *finesse* and *à-froid* at the supreme moment than he, who had always been so proud of his presence of mind? Ah! because nothing had seemed of vital importance. It was in-to be beaten and befooled by Victor; yet what could he do without more provocation? What could he do, Victor? Oh—h! The blackguard, the infernal scoundrel was, at this very moment! What a victorious position he had gained all along the line! In those two damned days when he had gained nothing, he was close to her now, Victor. Whatever he did or attempted he would be tried by a French jury. What would a French jury care about the honour of an English “miss”—who were none of them to have any honour to lose? Victor would be a triumph for La France.

Oh, damnation of eternal loss! Great drops came out on Crawford's forehead when he reflected on this point.

It might not have been better to go round by the other side of the street and get into the garden of the hotel than to be here in the road opposite the *annexe*, with a high wall and a locked gate between him and it? If he went to the porter he would not get in without good reason—or could he tear himself away from the garden? And, again, could he tear himself away for ten minutes to go so far out of sight and hear- how weak and irresolute he felt! How he hated himself and all the world!

He looked out of the side window with a light in it he made up his mind to go to his room. The light was extinguished; she had gone to bed. God—what . . .? Suddenly the window was opened and the head and shoulders of a man emerged—it was Victor!

“What the hell do you mean by being in that room!” his words, which would have been almost a yell, were at the end of Crawford's tongue, when he remembered that the room at the room was Kitty's was due to his fancy only. Though he did not speak, he stood transfixed, and his hands began to beat.

Victor's face was turned away from Crawford towards the moon, which now hung over the hills above the valley. The face looked like the stone image of a saint with its eyes turned up as if in prayer. Indeed, it was in prayer—prayer of the sort which befitted his

faith of *libre penseur* in common life, catholic in moments of supreme emotion. Victor was not now invoking any of the celestial powers, Jésus or Marie. But he was making pious vows, resolutions for his future conduct, should the celestial beings but this once grant success to his love. His amours should come to an end; he would take Kitty away, far away to some arcadian retreat; and then he would write nothing but good books; perhaps he would give up romances altogether, and write religious poetry. "Ah, then!" he cried, looking up into the inexpressibly clear sky, "I will make amends, and you will grant me this one more last succès." He felt almost religious, almost pure from sin; he was all on the side of the spirit against the flesh; Yvonne's well-rounded figure tempted him no more, her "deal board" terrified him no more. He was pure in spirit, so he deemed; while every fibre of his being was vibrating in suspense and in hope.

Crawfurd Tennant watched and marked, unconsciously, as it were, the beauty of those pure serene contours in the white light, and was chained to the spot. His first wish had been to jump into the shade; as he was without the power of accomplishing it, he said, "I'll be damned if I hide myself."

"*Ma foi!* It is Crawfurd Ténant. How are you, *mon cher?*" Victor's voice floated softly down. "Taking a walk by the clear moon?" (Desanges spoke in English, as he always did when he wanted to annoy his friend.) "What a night! And those beautiful mountains! I could stay for ever in this country, could not you?"

"Delicious!" said Crawfurd. He in his turn spoke French. He struck a light for his pipe, which had gone out—when, he could not have told. He pulled and pulled and then found that the pipe was empty. "Curse it!" he said, throwing down the match and trampling upon it. Then he steadied his voice to say, "Yes, I'm out for a little walk. Why do not you come too?" His English instinct not "to give himself away" still overmastered his passion.

"Ah, well," said Victor in a pleasant voice, which contrasted with his pale face, "it is an idea! But no, it is not possible: the gate is locked. It is the Rich and St. Lazare. We cannot get to you, or you to usse." He laughed a light Mephistopheles laugh and drew in his head. Then his nervous temperament felt the reaction, and he grew sick at heart. "I was a fool to say that! It will make him watch, perhaps." Victor did not shut his window quite, but drew back and listened

breathlessly, till at last Crawford's steps slowly passed away. Their click-click upon the hard road was what the bell was to Macbeth. "Now," he said, "it must. *Du courage! Bonne chance!*"

"No: I can't stand this any more. I'll go to Churton to-morrow" (Churton had left Les Preulx since Crawford started on his expedition) "and tell him Victor's not a fit man to know. What a *devilish* laugh he had! If to-morrow should be too late! The place seemed as quiet as the dead. Can I make up my mind to go home? If it's quite quiet when I pass again I will. There, I've walked to the *pierre kilométrique*: I'll turn back.

"That's the room," Victor had said to himself when he reached his own in the *dépendance* that night. Kitty had just preceded him, and there was a light under the door. Once, the door had opened and shut again: opening his own gently he had listened, holding his breath, and heard no drawing of a bolt or turning of a key.

His resolution was taken. Victor's temperament was now strung up to one trembling chord of passion. In imagination he already saw himself victorious—slightly repulsed—a pretence of terror—then . . . Oh, God! Next moment he plunged back into an agony of fear and doubt, fear of unsucess, not of discovery.

"What—who—what's that?" said Kitty, starting awake.

"Pst-e!" said a voice in her ear. "Do not move: do notte speak."

What was happening? where was she? All this evening had been like some strange dream. Kitty fancied herself in the Cordillacs' rooms and that the wondrous vision of the starry night was about to reappear. She closed her eyes for a moment: the next she came fully to her own consciousness.

"Why—what is it, what is the matter?" she said.

"I will tell. Onli you must not speak—not a word. You must not mind my holding your 'ands."

"But I do mind," said Kitty, coming more and more to herself and trying to drag her hands away. "Oh—h!"

Here Victor put one hand over her mouth. "Pste—pste! You *must* be quiet. Now, listen to me."

Kitty was fully awake now, though the experiences of the last few hours were rushing through her brain ready to burst it.

She was paralysed with conflicting conjectures, some strange hope lingering within her, and yet such present fright, terror, that she had almost lost her voice.

"You shall speak in one minute. Ah, *ma chérie*, oh, Kitty *adorée*, I love you. Oh, do not—stop . . . But no: do try to love me a little: oh, Kitty, I pray . . ."

Victor had begun in a firm persuasion that, if Kitty did not yield of her free will, he had yet obtained some mystic or mesmeric power over her. How passively she had let herself be drawn to him under the hotel lamp! But now he was beginning to lose his head and lose his English, while Kitty was just getting her mouth free.

"Listen!" Victor went on, "I have a power over you. You cannot moof. Now I have been in the room ten minutes, and you have not cried out. If you cry now you are lost. Oh, Kitty, *adorée*, have mercy!" Victor put his head down beside hers. She shook herself free. He had persuaded himself that he had hypnotised her.

"*N'importe*," he said to himself, doggedly, "I have failed. Let her make as much noise as she pleases."

Kitty, on her side, opened her mouth to scream. But not a loud sound came from it. She thought that she was really mesmerised. Then she gave a great "honk" and fainted.

At the same moment Victor heard, without paying much attention to it, a great crash. He felt the clamminess of the cheek which was touching his, and with that and his disgust at Kitty's determined resistance, his passion left him. He began to see that he had made a fool of himself. If Yvonne, if Claude de la Souvraye could have heard those vows of his under the moon, how they would laugh! The thing to do was to get out of this imbroglio as quickly as possible. So in the end he dashed his hand in a basin of cold water, threw some over Kitty, and left the room.

"You infernal blackguard!" greeted him out of the darkness: at the same moment he received a blow which knocked him a senseless heap at Kitty's door.

And now scream after scream came from behind it. At once a dozen doors, all it contained save three, opened along the passage of the *dépendance*. Lights were struck; and the greatest scandal which had ever sapped the foundations of the Hôtel d'Angleterre took shape out of the darkness.

Strange to say—had anyone had leisure to notice it—Ioné Churton now appeared at the head of the stairs clad in a long

black cloak with a hood over her face. And at a later time Crawford, who was the only person who at all noticed from what direction she had sprung, had a recollection of hearing two voices, a man's and a woman's, in a room down below at the time when, after hearing Kitty's faint scream, he had rushed into the *annexe* bent on vengeance and slaughter.

CHAPTER XLVII.

MRS. CHURTON did what she always did on occasions of trouble: she had a headache and stayed in bed; and no one but her maid sought her society. In the afternoon, however, as she was sitting up before a fire (it had turned cold again), she received a message from the proprietor, asking for an interview.

Mr. Kettmann came in bowing in the best manner of a German Swiss, who was also one-fourth a Jew.

"You are bätter I drust, madam," he began.

"Yes," Mrs. Churton answered, scarcely looking at him.

He turned his soft hat three times round in his hands before he spoke again. "You are berhaps leafing to-day?" he said, insinuatingly.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Churton. "Not till my husband comes back, at the earliest."

"He shall not be back to-day? Do-morrow, perhaps, do-morrow mordig?"

"No: not for three more days probably," Mrs. Churton said, in an encouraging voice.

The proprietor stopped: he looked anything but encouraged; and now four times more he twisted round his hat.

"It is môzzt pénful to me—to häve to do anytig whatäfer to incónvenience any wonne of my guästs . . ." Here he paused. Mrs. Churton only looked up in blank surprise.

"But to lyve by my hótél I am as you zee in ze haands of my glients. And when zey dretten all to leaf me . . ."

"But I have told you we are not leaving immediately," Mrs. Churton put in, crossly.

"Ah, madam, zat is yoost ze bôynt," he shook his head sadly, but with a certain firmness. "It is to aske you to leaf dat I am

coom." And, desperation arming him with a sort of courage, there came a change in the man's look.

Mrs. Churton was a coward before all persons except her husband and her dependants. Some suspicion of the man's meaning suddenly flashed upon her. Her eyes fell before the new determined look of the proprietor. But she raised them at once, and tried to look him down. "I shall go when I think good," she said.

"But that shall be do-morrow or de mordig äfter at lätest, if you pleez," said the man, outwardly deferential, inwardly firm, now the ice had been broken. The last words were indeed spoken in so menacing a tone, that Mr. Kettmann deemed that he had said enough and withdrew.

Mrs. Churton fell back almost suffocated with fear and rage. Then she called her maid and told her to fetch Kitty.

Kitty was reported to be ill in bed. "I don't care how ill she is: she is to come to me at once," Mrs. Churton exclaimed; and the faithful Roberts brought the message intact to Miss Maynard.

Before the latter appeared Mrs. Churton had succeeded in getting hold of her daughter. For reasons of her own Ionë was this time greatly incensed against her friend—the cause of the *esclandre* of last night, which might have had—perhaps might still have—serious consequences for some one else as well as for Kitty Maynard. So Ionë summoned up and felt all the British virtue of indignation against one who has been found out.

Kitty dressed herself; her head was aching, and she had a sort of hope that the events of last night had after all been only the parts of a feverish dream. But when she realised that no one had come near her that morning, she began to have a sense that some terrible misfortune was hanging over her or had already fallen: then Roberts brought Mrs. Churton's second message, and her fears increased.

To come from the *dépendance* to Mrs. Churton's room, the natural way was to mount the steps of the terrace which ran along the face of the hotel and enter by the door that looked upon it. The moment at which Kitty appeared was the fullest time of the afternoon, five o'clock tea-time, when many excursionists had come back, when, in this valley, the sun was sinking near his setting, and people were preparing to see the blush pass over the faces of those giant virgins who stood towering in the east. The experience which Kitty had during the

two minutes of her walk along the terrace, experience of staring eyes and lifted skirts, was one to last her a lifetime. But during those two minutes she grew up. Not fear any more, but "indignation and fire-eyed defiance" were the feelings which seethed in her breast when she reached Mrs. Churton's room; she was a new personage whom none of her friends at Les Preulx would have known as young Kitty Maynard.

Mrs. Churton was not one who, when her temper was roused, spared the use of words or employed euphuisms.

"Well, I hear you have been behaving in the most scandalous and disgraceful way," she began, before the girl could open her mouth so much as to ask what she wanted. "In return for our kindness to you, you've brought disgrace upon us all; so much so"—Mrs. Churton, who had paled before the landlord, was red as a peony now—"that the proprietor of this hotel has already had the impertinence, the gross impertinence and impudence to ask that we shall go away. Of course, I have no doubt that that Mrs. Hawthornethwaite is at the bottom of it; but your disgraceful conduct . . ."

"I haven't had any disgraceful conduct," said Kitty, red with anger in her turn.

"Don't answer me, Kitty. After all the kindness we have shown to you, to bring such a disgrace upon us . . ."

"I tell you I've not done anything disgraceful!" said Kitty, stamping her foot. Her fury, her determination not to give way to all those odious people, overcame her illness and faintness. She had had nothing to eat that morning, and had asked for nothing.

"You have disgraced yourself forever . . ." Mrs. Churton began.

"I have not! I have not!" repeated Kitty, hotly. Mrs. Churton was surprised at her tone of defiance.

"I don't choose to argue with you," she said; "I know perfectly well what you did . . ."

"You don't; because I did not do anything."

"You will have to stay till my husband returns; but then . . ."

"I won't, I won't stay another day!" said Kitty, and flung herself from the room.

Then the memory of that awful terrace came upon her, and a sudden faintness came over her. She could avoid going all along it by taking some inner passages in the hotel. When she did finally appear she held her head high, but her heart had stopped

beating and her limbs were trembling. She fancied that all the conversation likewise stopped at once; that even the rattle of spoons and cups ceased, to concentrate every gaze upon herself. But one man she passed looked at her with kindly sympathetic eyes a moment ere he lowered them and bowed. He was walking with a crutch; she remembered afterwards that it was Mr. Hanchurch. Tears filled her heart and throat ere she got to her room, at the recollection of that one friendly limping figure.

It was Mrs. Hawthornethwaite's bold stroke for power—and must it be said, revenge?—the scheme of uniting her special circle in a protest against the stay of the Churtons in the Hôtel d'Angleterre, or at any rate of Kitty Maynard. Mrs. Smiles had been persuaded and coerced into speaking to the proprietor; and Mrs. Smiles was an important person, who, because she was always on the spot, was a connecting link between successive batches of Mr. Kettmann's English-speaking guests, and was even a sort of unpaid agent and interpreter for him. The Hawthornethwaites were two, with a maid and a courier; the Rowbothams were two—Miss Rowbotham the aunt, Miss Gertrude Rowbotham the niece; the Marjories were two more, and Mrs. Hawthornethwaite gained over the Spigotts, a family of four, Oldham people, whom she had hitherto kept at arm's length, and who had come to Les Preulx to stay. All these put their hands to a round-robin threatening to migrate at once if the Hôtel d'Angleterre were not purged of its scandalisers. What was the unfortunate Kettmann to do—and the best part of the season over?

Kitty got back to her room and locked the door. She cried—tears of sorrow, tears of rage. "What did Aunt Annette mean? How did she dare? And those others on the terrace: why was she not armed with thunderbolts?" Then she thought of Mr. Hanchurch, and sobbed with self-pity and mute appeals for help.

It was not long before there came an interruption, a knocking; and, when she opened the door, Ionë Churton burst into the room. She had become more comfortable about herself; and her good nature and her curiosity had come into play.

"What a *fool* you've been!" said Ionë, without taking breath.

"I've *not* been a fool: I've not done anything," said Kitty, flaming into anger once more.

"Perhaps you think you've been clever, then, to get caught with Victor Desanges in your b . . ."

"How dare you say so!" said Kitty, stopping her and starting up. "Who says that wicked lie?"

"Everybody, if you wish to know."

"They don't: nobody says so; it's a horrid lie that you've invented."

Ionë put out her lips contemptuously. "It's disgusting: you'll get us all talked about . . ."

"Nobody can tell such wicked abominable lies about me: nobody thinks such a thing . . ."

"I suppose you mean he never was in your room . . ."

Kitty stared for a moment. Her mind had been in such a turmoil of rage that the events of last night, which had always seemed half phantasmal, had by now sunk back quite to the region of nightmare. Half an hour earlier, in Mrs. Churton's room, she would have been prepared to swear that nothing whatever had happened. Just at this moment a reaction began. The sustaining force of anger was in a certain degree deserting her: a nameless fear began to creep into her heart.

"Because, unfortunately for you," her friend went on, after a moment's pause, "I saw him coming out myself. I happened just to open my own door, and the moonlight was shining in from the stairs." Ionë paused to rectify her narrative, which was not in complete accordance with the facts.

"I—I don't know, I can't remember," Kitty faltered. "I was—asleep," she said, hesitatingly, knowing that she had felt at one time broad awake and under a stranger influence than sleep.

"Oh, of course," the other sneered. "You're quite right to stick to that, though." Ionë had really been in hopes that Kitty would make a confidante of her. She was not sure but that her friend had two lovers, and that the accidental encounter of the two had led to the *esclandre*. The other would, of course, be Crawford Tennant, who, even in London days, had for a while almost taken possession of Kitty. At the moment of the encounter, Ionë had been too terrified about her own position to have time to render exact account of what happened. If Kitty had confided any guilty secret to her, a sense of honour amongst thieves would have made the other girl befriend her even to her own hurt: now she was determined to throw her over.

At this moment a heavy tread came along the corridor and paused at Kitty's door and knocked. "Come in," cried Ionë first; and a man in the dress of a guide held out a note, which Kitty took.

"Ah, I suppose he's written to you," Ionë said, in a mocking voice; and, before the other could recover her surprise, she had gone. The note was from Crawford Tennant asking her to meet him in the garden in ten minutes. "What does it mean? Oh, what will happen to me?" said Kitty in sick dread. But she went out all the same. She might have noted the broken-down gate, which in the creeping dusk looked whiter than by day.

All that morning Crawford Tennant had been a transformed person, transformed and reformed. He was proud of himself, ready to meet the consequences of his act—one of which would of course be to "meet," in a technical sense, Victor Desanges as soon as he was again able to hold a pistol or sword. Crawford was full of the sense of having championed his nation and the women of his nation, and filled with a British hatred of the vicious ways of France. What he felt with regard to Kitty Maynard was less clear to him. He longed to see her and yet was afraid. When he came face to face with her he saw the black streaks which had been drawn under her eyes and the hectic colour on her face, and a great passion of tenderness filled his heart: he longed to take her in his arms and kiss away the tears. She seemed to have grown visibly thinner in the last eighteen hours. For the first time for fifteen years Crawford felt shy before a woman; and it was only now that he realised what an awkward meeting this was.

"I am rather afraid," Crawford began, "that I was hasty last night."

"You, Mr. Tennant?" said Kitty, in unfeigned surprise.

"By Jove," said Crawford to himself, "she doesn't know that I'm in it." "Well, you see," he went on, under a sort of instinct to be on his guard, "it was I who broke the gate in because . . . when I was outside in the road I thought I heard you call out."

Kitty gave a shiver, as the terrors of the night came back to her. Then suddenly Ionë's words leapt into her mind: "I suppose you mean he was never in your room." (Nay, she had said a worse thing than that; what Kitty would not repeat even to herself.) Suddenly her courage failed her: to be accused felt

like being guilty. She blushed crimson and said nothing: she knew that Crawford was eyeing her narrowly.

"Perhaps I was mistaken in thinking that?" the latter said, keenly. He felt less chivalrous now than he had done five minutes ago.

Do what she would Kitty could not raise her head and look him in the face. In her relations with Mr. Tennant, liking had always alternated with a sort of fear. What had he heard? What did he suspect?

"I dare say I should have done best to leave matters alone. But I'm afraid the fat's in the fire now, at any rate."

"I'm going away; I won't stay here," said Kitty, struggling with the sobs that rose in her throat. "Aunt Annette says . . . I've not done anything . . . I've—I've disgraced myself. I'll never speak to her again as long as I live. If Uncle Tom was here . . ."

"Is he coming back?" said Crawford, who knew now that Churton had left.

"Not till Thursday; I won't wait till Thursday, I am going home at once. Oh!" Kitty gave a groan, for at that moment she remembered that she had no money.

"Quite right. Look here, I'll take you, Kitty," Crawford Tennant said, slightly leaning upon the last word.

"Oh, will you?" said Kitty, gratefully, looking up for the first time.

"Of course I will, dear child." ("Who could refuse such eyes as those?" was what Crawford said to himself.)

But Kitty involuntarily shuddered and drew back a little. Unconsciously she made a comparison between Crawford and that lame Mr. Hanchurch. With him, she thought at that moment, she would have travelled to the world's end. Crawford saw or felt the slight instinctive shrinking, and the chivalry of his feelings descended a degree lower. "Of course I will," he said, coming close to Kitty. "I'll arrange it all. . . . Look here," he added, "that Desanges is a blackguard. He's married, you know."

"I don't want to hear any more about M. Desanges," said Kitty, with a break in her voice, which gave a rather false impression to her interlocutor. Kitty was in her turn growing desperate. She began to distrust everybody and be afraid to do anything. "I shall go away to morrow," she repeated, as if speaking to herself.

"And I'll take you back," said Crawford, decisively.

"No, no, thank you very much. I think I'd rather go alone."

"You couldn't. You'd never find your way."

"Ah, no," thought Kitty, "I've no money;" and she hung her head.

"No, you'd never manage it. I'll take you. You needn't be afraid of me, hang it all! I'm an old friend of your father's." And Crawford at that moment quite believed what he said. He took hold of Kitty's hand as he spoke and kept it. She felt no power of resistance, no power of decision.

"I won't—I can't—I'll never speak to Aunt Annette again," was all she was quite decided on when she and Crawford had separated.

She had one more visitor before dinner-time. This was Miss Budge. "Mumma," Mary Budge told her, didn't like her coming. But kindness and curiosity and doubts of Kitty's guilt had prevailed with the young American. It must be said, that a closer observation of Miss Churton's ways had made the Budges cool towards these new English acquaintance. But Mary began, now she was with Kitty, to think that she must not be judged by the same standard. She asked what she could do to help.

"Oh, if you *would*!" said Kitty, pitifully.

"I will, then," said Mary Budge, melting at once; and she took Kitty in her arms, the first person—except Mr. Hanchurch—who had shown any real kindness since yesterday. The two girls cried for some time on each other's shoulders. And, in the event, Mary Budge emptied all her purse out into Kitty's hands and gave her money enough to go home with. She did more than this. Later on she sent her maid to take Kitty her dinner, and she herself came back later, having looked up the trains and brought her experience of travel to help the other's ignorance. And there were more tears shed and vows of correspondence exchanged; and Miss Maynard was made then and there to promise to pay the Budge family a visit at New Haven, Hartford County, New York.

That night Kitty passed in a feverish sleep, starting awake every hour, for fear of missing the first diligence, by which she was determined to travel, unaided and alone.

It was eleven weeks, to a day, from that late-June morning, when Kitty Maynard had steamed into Liverpool Street Station, with the instinct that she was entering a new and inexpressibly

delightful world. Now, and in this wise, had foundered miserably the barque, which like a young man or a prodigal had set sail from that port far away in the eastern counties of England, towards which all Kitty's longings now turned.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

VERY early in the morning Kitty stole from the Hôtel d'Angleterre, leaving in her room a note for "Uncle Tom" and another for Mr. Tennant, thanking the latter for his offer of help, but explaining her change of plans. Her box, too, was left to be sent after her; she took only a small hand-bag in order to fly the more swiftly. The early diligence was not generally crowded; Kitty got a place in it, but with an amount of difficulty, owing to her want of French, which made her heart sick.

The diligence started at six. They flew along the white road; and, in the sharp eastern breeze, huge clouds of dust ran before them and stretched their misty arms skyward, like ghosts fleeing before the rising sun, whose red face began to peep over the hills at their back. The great white chain of mountains looked coldly down, and endless fear filled the heart of Kitty Maynard, from which the excitement of anger had all departed. An endless fear. Had she done right in going, after all? What would all those behind go on saying about her? What report would come to those in front; to her mother—Oh—h!—to Mrs. Ayntree? The handsome Mr. Massy—her first disillusionment in life—what would he hear about her? And all the other friends she had made in London? Then once more she thought of those two minutes spent in crossing the terrace, and she shuddered in fear and cold. She was still only a child; ignorant of nearly everything, and abandoned in an unkindly world.

At Annécý, where the diligence stopped, all was confusion and bustle. At last, amid a hundred counter-directions, she made her way to the *guichet* and asked for a ticket for England. The booking clerk gave her one without hesitation; and she did not observe that, out of the handful of gold which she held out to him, he chose but one *louis*, and gave her change from that.

An hour, two hours' journey ; then they stopped ; and men came along the train, opening the carriage-doors. Kitty, absorbed in her own thoughts, still sat on, until a ticket-collector came and took her ticket, and showed her the name upon it—Angelas. It was the same name as on the white wall of the station.

"*Pour Angleterre, pour Angleterre !*" Kitty repeated in her slurred French. A volley of words followed ; another official came up, with more volleys of words. At length a hurrying traveller, a German, was found who could interpret, and the truth was made plain—that she had received a ticket for Angelas when she asked one for England ; that she would have to return all the route she had made, would have to change at Geneva, etc.—what, indeed, Miss Budge had impressed upon her the night before, but in her confusion in front of the ticket-office she had not taken into account.

It was a misery beyond tears. Kitty felt that she was fated, that all things were against her. But soon she found—as people always find—that the need for action is the enemy of fear. She watched, this time with a reviving interest, the shortening shadows and larger crowds in the stations she passed through on the return journey. At last she came once more to Annécý, and was scarcely surprised to find Crawford Tennant standing in the station looking about him. She did not look his way ; but she felt sure he would see her as she crossed over to the Geneva train.

"Ah, here you are, Miss Maynard," he said in a quite friendly voice.

Kitty felt relieved. If only he was not angry. She did not know why she had been so anxious to travel alone ; the idea seemed like a night fancy which faded in this bright afternoon sunlight.

She began to explain. She did not like to ask him to get up so early. She was very anxious to start as soon as possible.

"Oh, it's all right," Crawford said. "If I'd known you wanted to go by the early diligence I'd have arranged that. But what have you been doing, then, to miss the other train?"

Kitty had to explain, not without blushes, and Crawford laughed.

"You see travelling's not always such an easy thing," he said in the manner of a kind elder brother. Then he noticed she had brought no wraps with her, and arranged one of his own about her knees, for the day was a little frosty. Crawford,

too, had felt changed by that morning's air and the movement. He had begun to think he had made a fool of himself all round at Les Preulx, and must have got a maggot. What a preposterous thing that night walk of his seemed to him now! Of course he had left his address with Victor; but he hoped Desanges would have the sense to let the whole thing drop.

So he and Kitty got on very pleasantly through the rest of the afternoon. Crawfurd had got her some *déjeuner* at Annécy. Kitty's colour came back and some of her cheerfulness.

But when they got near Geneva Crawfurd Tennant once more became pensive. At one station he got out and had a talk with the guard, and when he came back, he said—

"You know, after all, you were right in wanting to take the early train: we should have been able to get straight through to Paris."

"How do you mean straight through? why . . ."

"To-night, I mean, from Geneva." Curiously enough, Crawfurd's voice shook just a little as he said this, though he tried to speak in as indifferent a tone as possible.

"But there is a train to-night?"

"No, there isn't. It's just been taken off."

"Oh, Mary Budge told me that, whichever diligence I went by, I could . . ."

"Ah, well, I suppose she got hold of an August time-table. They've only just changed them, it seems. However, there's a very good train in the morning, the man tells me. It's only a question of about eight hours."

"But what can I do?" Kitty said, her colour coming with anxiety.

Crawfurd raised his eyebrows. "Oh, what everybody else does: go to a hotel. . . . I'll arrange all that," he added, indifferently.

"Oh, I don't want to do that," Kitty said, possessed by a vague fear. "Are you quite sure there's no train to-night? I'll ask."

"I have asked," Crawfurd said, rather crossly. "But we can ask again at Geneva, if you like. It'll save your having to stay in Paris, I fancy. . . . You didn't expect to get home without ever leaving the train or steamer, did you?" he asked, seeing Kitty still looked unsatisfied.

"Yes, I thought . . ." she hesitated.

"Oh, it would be impossible—for you, I mean. I've come straight through from London before now."

And Crawford Tennant did arrange "all that." "Ionē," Kitty said to herself, "would have made herself quite at home and let Mr. Tennant do as much as he would for her." And she tried to feel at ease in imitating that line of conduct: for none other seemed open to her.

The room into which she was shown at the hotel was an immense one, more like a sitting-room than a bedroom. It had old velvet chairs and sofa, a large, round table, and heavy, handsome curtains. The little bed far off was hardly visible in the dim light. Kitty felt half afraid to be in such a handsome room; but she had now resigned all initiative. After two feverish nights and days and want of sufficient food, she felt weak as a child. The excitement of movement had kept her up during the day. It was as if she were still in the train, and the room swayed about her.

Crawford had said something about their having dinner presently, and she took off her hat and made a little toilette. Then the *bonne* came in and asked if Madame would do something, and said something about a table, and Kitty murmured a faint "oui." The room was still unsteady and she felt but half awake. But she started up again when the waiter entered and began laying the cloth on the round table; still more when a knock came at her door, and Crawford Tennant almost immediately followed it into the room.

"Well," he said, cheerfully, "I think we shall both be better for a square meal and a quiet night before going to Paris."

"What's that for?" said Kitty, doubtfully, looking at the waiter.

"For dinner," said Crawford.

"But I can't dine with—you," Kitty said, her forehead flushing—she meant "in this room," but did not like to say so.

"Why not?" Crawford answered.

Every word came to Kitty's ears with a sort of reverberation, and yet as from a long way off.

"I think I'd rather not have dinner at all; I'm not hungry," she said.

"Oh, nonsense; you must be. You've had nothing since you left Les Preulx but that wretched sandwich and the brioche I got you. What's the matter with you?" Crawford sat down beside Kitty and spoke in a kind voice. "You're overdone that's it."

"Oh, yes, I'm so tired," Kitty said, letting her head fall on her hand. Her eyes closed of themselves.

Crawfurd looked at her for a moment with moist, eager eyes. Then he looked away. His heart was beating rapidly, but he was trying not to think or reason with himself. He rejoiced that the waiter came in at that moment and spared him the necessity of deciding upon his conduct in the future.

He pushed the table against the sofa on which Kitty was sitting and insisted on her remaining there, while he took a seat on the opposite side. His voice, though it still seemed to come from far away, had a pleasant familiar sound. She felt something like a person just saved from shipwreck, who is only anxious to bask in pleasant warmth and doze. Crawfurd roused her sufficiently to make her eat something. But when she had taken a glass of champagne her sleepiness increased so much that she could hardly sit up.

Crawfurd, himself, ate less than he drank. His heart was beating more fiercely than ever. "It's not my fault," he said to himself; "that other beast has done the mischief. By Jove, after all I don't know whether she didn't let him come in."

Tennant had come to Kitty's side. She straightened herself and drew slightly away from him.

"Well, don't you think you feel better now," he said, in his softest voice, which was very pleasant to hear.

"Yes; much," said Kitty, gently.

"Why didn't you want to come with me?" he went on, leaning towards Kitty.

"Oh, I didn't mind" (Crawfurd laughed slightly),—"I mean it wasn't that—I only wanted to get away as soon as I could."

"And now you'll never hear or see anything of those old cats again," Crawfurd said. She only answered by a great sigh of relief. "As if you hadn't the right to amuse yourself as you chose . . ."

"No, I never want to see any of them again."

"But I hope you don't count me among the people you don't want to see again?" Kitty shot a beam from her blue eyes: quite one of her old looks, which came to her instinctively and meant so much less than they seemed to mean.

"By Jove, you are a lovely girl, I don't wonder that everybody goes mad about you." Somehow, in the way Crawfurd said it, this did not seem offensive to Kitty. She had got used to those sort of things from him and to his rather caressing ways. It was pleasant to be spoken to pleasantly once more.

So she thought at first; but suddenly outside her conscious thoughts a terror came knocking at Kitty's heart and she

turned pale. An instinct told her companion that this was a supreme moment—at the same time he found that, while he had resolutely refused to look a single instant in advance, his conduct had determined itself.

"I say," he said in his kindest voice, "you look rather pale. Take one more glass of wine."

"No, thank you."

"Yes, you'd better. You've only had one glass. It's rather good champagne."

Kitty, as a rule, drank no wine. Her mother had always enforced this rule upon her children—and she cared for the taste of none other. But champagne was almost a passion with her. Still she hesitated.

"No, I think I'd rather not," she said, doubtfully.

"But I'd rather."

"Oh, Mr. Tennant."

"Yes, I insist. Only this glass," Crawford said, authoritatively. "Then it will be time for us both to go to our beds."

This half promise decided her.

Where was she? What had happened? What horror was this? Had she ever seen those red curtains before? What was that shrouded light over there? The whole scene was flooded with crimson and with horror. That awful M. Desanges had found her. No. "Help!" she tried to scream; then with a gigantic effort she jumped to her feet. He—M. Desanges—no; it was Mr. Tennant—tried to stop her. But she got loose somehow. She saw a door ajar, opening into blackness, and she rushed through. She had presence of mind enough to lock the door. Then her knees struck against a bed, and she sank down into nothingness.

"Whew!" whistled Crawford to himself. Then he looked round the room. Even to him it appeared like a new place. There were the bottle of champagne and the two glasses left on the shiny table. Away in the shade was the bed, and on it Kitty's hat and little bag. Here was he in her room and she was locked up in his. They always went on like that just at first, was his next reflection; she would open the door before the night was out.

"By gad!" Crawford continued to himself, "it was impossible to help it, when you saw her there. She's so infernally fetching." And he went on to prove conclusively (to himself) that

he had been overcome by his passion, and had not designed any harm at first; "or else I should never have been such a fool as to come to a hotel like this," he said. "I wish to the devil I hadn't now. . . . That chap seemed to know me; I know his face too."

Then Crawford went softly to the door of communication between the two rooms; from behind it he could hear a low continual sobbing. . . . "Confound it!" he went on presently, "she seems to be taking it rather badly. . . . What rot it is making such a fuss now-a-days—after that Desanges business too! I wonder what was the truth about that. . . . She wasn't crying like that then. I suppose there'll be a hell of a row in London with the Churtons. I felt perfectly mad about her when Victor was around—and I do still. I must get her to open the door and hear reason. The more row she makes now, the worse it will be for her. She must have the sense to see that. I don't see why any one need know anything, after all."

CHAPTER XLIX.

It was still night: Kitty awoke from a half stupor. Her cheeks were stained with tears. She knew that, when self-consciousness had all but deserted her, she had still lain sobbing on her bed. She had been in a stupor of hysteria, in truth, which took from her the sense of time and of reality.

Sobbing upon her bed: "Mercifui heaven," she suddenly said to herself, "upon whose bed? Whose room was this? Why had the owner never come into it? If he were suddenly to come in now . . ." She tried to move: an agony of pain shot through her head and swept across her eyes; but as the memory of things came back to her, her terror increased each moment and overcame the pain. She raised herself at last and listened. Then she remembered with fresh terror that she had heard Mr. Tennant's voice more than once on the other side of the door, and, half unconscious as she was, had shrunk more into herself and felt more paralysed than ever, while she emitted without ceasing the same trembling sob or sobbing groan, "Oh—h—h!"

But now all was quiet. A gas lamp from without drew a

lace pattern on the ceiling and gave reflected light enough for her to see the room. There was a man's small portmanteau open. Mr. Tennant's! Of course: *now* she remembered! He had come into her room through that door. She drew her foot away from the portmanteau, as if it had power to sting her. This fresh goad of fear spurred her on.

She was in the passage: a single uncovered jet, with glass shade above, hung over the stairs and seemed to gaze at her like a threatening eye. Down the stairs she crept and into the court, but only to find the double doors closed and fast. "Let me out! let me out!" she cried, low at first, and soon louder, as people cry in nightmares who struggle to get their voice and cannot. Suddenly, all hysterical as she was, her heart ceased to beat, and her horror rose to fever point; for in the big gateway a smaller door opened slowly of itself, *no one* passing through it. A moment she stood glued to the spot: the next, uttering a cry, she rushed through into the blackness, tripped and almost fell on the rough wet pavement, and then ran on and on, round corners, down silent, stony, echoing streets, until in the end she paused breathless to find herself alone in an unknown city in an unknown world.

The chill air froze her sobs, but made her teeth chatter with cold. Figures, the mockery of her own, figures from out of a ghastly dream, prowled about the deserted ways, as dogs prowl about the sleeping bazaars of an oriental town.

She saw a ragged shape with white hair lying within an archway, where perhaps it had fallen dead drunk. Then there loomed from under the gas and in the misty rain the shining cloak and *képi* of a sergent-de-ville. He stared hard at her; but before he had made up his mind to speak she had hurried past, turned another corner and wandered once more into silence, ignorant of the terror that that stare of his might have had for her.

"Ma voi," said the agent to himself in his Swiss-French, "elle était gentile. Si j'avais demandé à voir sa carte."

For in all outward appearance Kitty was a *fille en carte* and nothing more, and as such the destined prey of any agent who threatened to take her into custody.

She could not make plans, or fix her thoughts in any direction. Faint as she was, she still wandered on and on, confusing the objects before her eyes with those which memory and fancy evoked. One moment she was looking at a high white wall fringed with spikes, a note of dark foliage behind, scarcely reached

by the gas-light of the narrow street; the next, she was gazing from her window in the Hôtel d'Angleterre, and hearing a cattle-bell from the hill opposite. But this landscape too was steeped in misery, and the single bell kept sounding, sounding, through the gathering darkness, as the lone bell-buoy sounds across a reef where there is none to hear. Then, most vividly, came before her the landscape which she had tried to paint. Here was something which she had failed to reach in her life—while she was still alive; and now from that life she was shut out forever; with nothing left to do now but to crouch back, as at that moment, because with immense noise and two staring eyes of light an omnibus came rattling over the stones. How *fearful* that sound seemed! And the crackling of the whip: it stung her nerves as though the lash had fallen upon her own shoulders.

By all the height that she had arisen before she had fallen now; Kitty remembered as of some other person, that she had once said to herself that everyone liked her, Mr. Kettmann the proprietor, the gold-laced porter, the waiters, the muleteers, all the Churtons, the whole world, in fine, of the Hôtel d'Angleterre—except Mrs. Hawthornethwaite. Now she was abandoned by the whole world; no home in it left for her. The scene on the terrace, of yesterday—ah! no, the day before yesterday—which afterwards she had looked back upon as something unendurable, now seemed almost friendly by comparison with her present desolation. If she could have had the opportunity of going back to that scene once more and blotting out all that had passed since then!

The lights of the streets had changed into long serpents which darted wriggling forwards and then shrank back into themselves. Kitty stopped for a while to watch this phenomenon with interest, forgetting all else; for she was growing at moments a little light-headed. Then a voice out of the night made her start and recalled her to a terror of everything. She tripped over an iron ring and came down, scratching her hands pitifully. (She was, in truth, now walking by the quays.) To think that she should have been allowed to hurt herself like that! Tears of pain and vexation came to her eyes; for of late Kitty had been habituated to all imaginable small attentions. She remembered Mr. Hugo Pemberton on the mystic mountain-side. She saw at one and the same time the wriggling lights and the spider who had stretched across the breadth of Mount Blanc.

Howbeit this fall had brought her somewhat to herself. Instead of seeing visions, she began in a confused way to think. She thought first of her recent life: all the joyous expeditions of the last few weeks came back to her (along with an actual wet stony road now going up hill—by this time she had left the wriggling lights behind her). Next there came before her memory all the friends she had left behind in London, Mr. Massy, the Ayntrees; none of them could have really been so kind as she supposed. How Mr. Massy had deserted her! All must be in some way responsible for leaving her like this. Whereupon Kitty realised suddenly that all her best friends, all those whom she really liked *much*, were men—Uncle Ned, Uncle Tom, Mr. Massy, Mr. Pemberton—oh, and Bertie, too!—down to that one over there (she shivered), whom, till yesterday, she had thought of as her friend likewise. That was it: men were—

More false than monkeys, more base and brutal than swine.

Not in exact words did Kitty formulate this doctrine, but that was the tenor of her thoughts.

She started and trembled: a piercing shriek had rung in her ears. It seemed for a moment to be the shriek of all woman-kind in the hands of the violator man. The next moment Kitty—now more in possession of her senses—saw innumerable lights of many different colours winking at her; at the same time she was conscious that grey dawn with noiseless wings was descending upon the earth. And a certain peace fell upon her soul. She was not now quite and at all times mistress of herself. But those lights, which she knew now were railway lights, that shriek of the engine held out a hand of helpfulness and of hope. She saw that, in all her wanderings of the night, she had unconsciously drawn nearer the goal of the peaceful home at Norwich to which her only hopes turned—ever since she left the scene upon the terrace of the hotel at Les Preulx, ever since the white dust had fled ghost-like before the rays of the morning sun.

“There must have been some tragedy going on last night,” said Lady Frances Playgrove. “I heard some woman just above me crying and sobbing all through the night. It sounded most romantic.”

Hugo Pemberton winced at this last sentence. Her own trouble (he chose always to believe that Fanny had been very

fond of her husband) had, as he was often obliged to confess to himself, made his sister rather hard.

There were three of them—Lady Frances, Hugo, and Miss Throgmorton—seated at the stern of the little “Bonnivard,” which ploughed its way and churned up the blue waters of the lake.

“Did you hear anything said? I wonder what country people they were?” said Sophy Throgmorton.

“English, I fancy; I thought once I heard, ‘Go away! go away!’ from the woman.”

All at once Hugo’s face took on a look of terror. He had recognised Crawford Tennant walking along the passage of his landing; some unaccountable instinct made him suddenly (in after-years he never knew why) divine the truth.

“Did *you* hear anything, Mr. Pemberton?” said Sophy, looking hard at Hugo. “They were on your floor.”

A perspiration had broken out on Hugo’s forehead; he would have given anything if he could have turned round the head of the steamer and made straight for home. “But why didn’t you get up and see?” he said to his sister.

“My dear Hugo! One can’t enquire on the spot into everything which goes on in an hotel. Perhaps they had had some loss. They may have been to a funeral—or just seen a relation die.”

“Not if she said, ‘Go away! go away!’”

“I only fancied that; I couldn’t be sure.”

“Oh, I wish you’d come and told me,” said Hugo, with pain.

“What a chivalrous fellow you are!” said Lady Frances, in genuine admiration. “I know you would throw yourself into anything.” Sophy Throgmorton, likewise, looked up admiringly and with moist eyes. Her momentary suspicion—she loved him so much she could not help these unreasoning jealousies—all melted into wonder and hero-worship. “I did feel inclined to,” Lady Frances went on; “but I wasn’t quite sure of your number.”

Hugo Pemberton felt strangely unhappy. His whole nature quivered at the thought of suffering, still more of wrong. Any woman caused for any reason to sob all night was in itself almost more than he could bear. But the belief—the totally unreasonable belief—that this woman was the beautiful child whom he had known at Les Preulx was an agony to think of. Perhaps some tone of Kitty’s voice had reached his ears

unnoticed by himself as he walked along the passage, and this was why her image would rise before him.

When, therefore, late that night, as he went to put some letters into the porter's bureau, he encountered Mr. Churton, dusty, unkempt, white, and stern, it seemed to him that he already knew the whole history.

"Good God!" he said, when they shook hands, with a face almost as white as Mr. Churton's own, "then it *was* Miss Maynard."

"You've seen Kitty; then tell me what you know?" said Churton, and his voice trembled. "Look here; come this way." They went into the deserted smoking-room, where a waiter had already begun to put out the lights. Twice another waiter looked in to tell Mr. Churton that his supper was ready, and withdrew again. Churton, taken unawares, had made Pemberton a confidant of the whole matter.

"Oh, God!" said Hugo to himself, as in the small hours of the morning he walked about his room alone. "That you should let such things be! Fiend that you are! Fiend! Fiend! Fiend!" Hugo Pemberton, in his sober moments the ardent preacher of the non-existence of a Deity, was, in moments of great excitement, wont to turn his first accusations against that Nothing. "Fiend! Fiend! Fiend!" He twisted his fingers so that he was in danger of putting them out of joint. His fury of passion was utterly remote from any personal interest, a true *sæva indignatio* at the wickedness of the world; and one that lacerated his heart.

He could not keep his feelings to himself. Next day, without mentioning any names, he told his sister the outline of the tragedy of two nights ago: nay, more than the outline—more than he knew for certain. For his imagination had filled in the story (as it always did—rightly in this case) all in favour of the woman and all against the man.

"It's *too* horrid!" said Lady Frances, sympathetic and indignant too; but not so much so. "But, after all, you don't know . . ."

"The man ought to be flogged to *death*," he said, grinding his teeth. "She's a mere *child* . . ."

"Oh, you *know* her, then?" As Lady Frances's jealousy awoke her sympathy cooled.

"Yes, I *told* you," said her brother, angrily. He was furious with everything and everybody.

"Do you know her well?"

"Well? yes—no. I met her"—he hesitated: above all he must betray no one—"at Les Preulx," he faltered.

"Still, dear," said Lady Frances, soothingly, "you can't make any guess what has actually happened. If it's only some one whom you met out there . . ."

She paused. Hugo said nothing. He had mentioned to her that the Churtons were at Les Preulx. He had *not* mentioned Kitty Maynard, strange—or not strange—to say.

"It's not—not one of Mr. Churton's girls?" said Lady Frances, with sudden inspiration.

"Oh, no; get that idea out of your head," replied her brother, confidently.

The pitifulness of this tragedy haunted the mind of Hugo Pemberton. It gave him a strange desire to lay himself at the feet of womankind in the abstract, and make amends to some member of it for the wrong which had been done by another member of his own.

Wherefore, the afternoon of the day following this dialogue of brother and sister, there took place another one, scarcely less moving, between the sister and her friend.

Lady Frances was alone in her room, just beginning a letter, when Sophy's tap came at the door, and almost before she could say "come in" the other's arms were round her neck.

"Oh, my dearest one!" she said. "He has spoken. He has asked me . . ." Tears showed the rest. Never before had Frances seen the calm and gentle Sophy Throgmorton so moved.

Lady Fanny took her in both her arms.

"I knew he was going to," she said; "*I am* so happy, dearest."

It was that same afternoon that the vision at the Norwich station of a young woman, dirty, dishevelled, without a jacket or any luggage or belongings—Kitty had had just sense enough left to buy herself a hat when she got to Paris: up to that point she had travelled bareheaded—and looking unspeakably ill, was a thing to attract the attention of the least observant; not the less so that, in spite of dirt and thinness and swollen eyes and stained cheeks, the girl had traces of great beauty. The Maynards were not well known in Norwich; but many people who did not visit with them knew Kitty Maynard by sight. The omnibus-driver recognised her well enough, and drove her home almost against her will; for Kitty was now in a high state of fever.

All that walking about the streets of Geneva had inflamed her ankle to double its natural size. But the fever of pain and hunger only added to that which was burning through her brain and all her nervous system.

Such an extraordinary thing as her appearance in this plight could not but be discussed. Doctor Abernethy, who attended Kitty through the nervous fever into which she had fallen, gleaned from her delirious talk some shrewd notion of the cause of her trouble. Under pledge of the profoundest secrecy he whispered this thrilling surmise to his wife; and Mrs. Abernethy took only one person into her confidence, Mrs. Mangin, the vicar's wife of St. Saviour's, the lowest church in Norwich. But somehow, through these small conduits, a terrible story leaked out. Before Kitty was well enough to pass beyond the garden of No. 78 Unthanks Road, she was an object of interest far outside the visiting circle of her mother and her aunts, the Miss Mouchesters. On her first appearance in church, she was the loadstar of many pairs of eyes, whereof the most part regarded her with feelings of benevolent hostility, such as women accord to other women, not their personal acquaintance, when these last have been pointed at by the finger of scandal.

Mr. Churton had appeared twenty-four hours later than Kitty had done: that fact was also known. Mrs. Ayntree heard before long what there was to hear in London and rushed down to see her *protégée*, full of sympathy, full also of a suppressed half-joyful excitement. She did not invite herself to stay with Mrs. Maynard, whom she had never tried to know: for Dr. Abernethy was an old friend of her husband. It may be doubted if her visit was a real kindness to Kitty. She meant it to be; but it was beyond her powers to remain utterly dumb.

There was one woman in the congregation of St. Saviour's who looked at Kitty's beautiful face—the ideal face for a Magdalen—with deeper feelings than curiosity: albeit she would have found it hard to say precisely what those feelings were. Rose Abernethy was a person who took the serious side of life very seriously. She was in a condition to be sympathetic—even against her conscience—when love-troubles of any kind were the theme. For, though she was supposed to have been sent to her uncle's from India because the climate of Bombay disagreed with her, in reality that in the air which her father and step-mother thought so hurtful was the circumstance that it was breathed by the chaplain, James Pringle, known half con-

temptuously in Bombay society as the "Little Padre." As she looked at Kitty Maynard's drooping face, Rose—sharing the general injurious misconception of the Swiss incident—thought she saw in it the beauty and the sadness of a perishing soul, not yet irrevocably lost.

How much Kitty knew just then of the talk which was going on around her it was impossible to say. The Maynards had few intimate friends. For a while an awful, though ignorant fear possessed her soul; it blotted out the sight of the people in church, and kept Kitty upon her knees at night through hours of agonised prayer. Mrs. Maynard, true to her principles, would have welcomed any disgrace which brought back one of her straying lambs to the fold of Jesus, as she hoped that Kitty was being at length brought back.

But when that haunting fear had gone, Kitty's zeal grew cool. It did not die utterly away; but it no longer answered the exacting requirements of her mother. Hope began to be born again, not hope of a life anything like the old. Man had grown hateful to Kitty; and all society—what is called "society"—not less so. But at nineteen there must be something left in life. Her secret longings turned to painting. Ah! if she could have once more gone out with Uncle Tom and painted as she had done that happiest morning in all her life! But all direct communication with the Churton family had ceased for her: Mrs. Churton had insisted on the point, and Kitty herself would never have made advances; some slight communication with her godfather was kept up through Mrs. Maynard and through Uncle Ned.

But failing help from Uncle Tom an artist's career was not to be thought of for Kitty. Her master was not particularly encouraging; and personally Kitty hated now going to the drawing-school (Harry Edwards had thrown himself at her feet a month after her return to Norwich). Bertram could not have supported her if he would: and Kitty could never have appealed to him for help in anything which must seem so chimerical. What Bertram did for her eventually was to get her a secretaryship to a friend of his, Mrs. Fisher-Pearson. Mrs. Pearson had been Violet Fisher. Her husband was a pamphleteering, much-agitating, not too well-washed politician: he is now a prominent member of the London County Council. Violet Fisher-Pearson and her husband had each their own sphere of activity: the former was now editor of *Womanhood*, the or-

gan of the advanced portion of her sex. It was in this work that Kitty was to help her : it must be owned that she brought this advantage, if it was one, to the paper, that male contributors were easier to obtain after the advent of the new secretary.

The work was hard to one of Kitty's limited education—harder than Bertram could at all have realised. But at all events it was a sphere of life totally remote from Kitty's past experiences and free and welcome in many ways. Mrs. Fisher-Pearson did, it is true, contrive to learn what was supposed by popular rumour to be the most interesting of the past experiences of her secretary. It was a text—hinted at only, of course—to prove the inferiority of man in all moral attributes. It bestowed upon Kitty a certain distinction and a special interest in the eyes of her friend and employer. But her rodomontine love of truth and straight dealing made Violet tell what she knew to one of her friends of the other sex who had become enamoured of her secretary. It may even be that she cherished her knowledge as a possible weapon, in case her young friend should ever become her enemy.

CHAPTER L.

"*Well*," said Ward, "this is the best thing *I* was ever in for."

He was riding by the side of Herbert Vanlennert, the commandant of the Amir's corps of mounted infantry, a body, he it said, that Herbert had organised and drilled himself. Though the American was not emotional, it was not without a thrill that he looked at the near and sharp line of the horizon black against the purple sky. The larger stars only blazed in it. For there rode among them the queen of the night intensely brilliant; the moon was near full and was now stooping to the west: the dawn could not be far.

The horses' hoofs crunched along the arid ground; the men behind kept up a continual low guttural talk. It was not yet necessary to impose silence in the ranks.

"You see this is a nullah, all right," Herbert said, "though it looked perfectly flat from the hill-side."

Every moment, in truth, the horizon line on their left drew a

little closer. On the right they could still see what looked like a phantom range of hills most strangely cut—by the effect of moonlight—into smooth, yellow patches and unfathomable grey-black clefts.

A vedette rode a little in front of them and to the left, so that he could just see on to the plain. How like a phantom he, too, was made by the light of the moon!

"Suppose now," Ward went on, "when the sun gets up we find that they've just planted a battery to shoot straight down this nullah."

"Well, they'd want guns that would shoot round a corner at present."

"Why, how do you know that?"

"I could see well enough—guess, at any rate—where the river, when there is one, comes out of the range."

"Do you expect Gholam's people will come through soon?"

"Ah, that I can't say."

"Suppose they don't get through till to-morrow afternoon."

"This afternoon, I suppose you mean."

"Why, yes, of course; I suppose it's four o'clock, ain't it?"

"Very near." Herbert had learnt to tell the time by the stars without looking at his watch. He saw two of the stars of *Leo* below the moon near their setting.

"Well, sha'n't we be in rather a tight place?"

"A very tight place. Of course we're all in the air at present. This gives us our best chance anyhow."

"They'd soon smash up those fellows down there." And Ward nodded his head backwards.

"Not if Abdullah Khan doesn't play the fool, and refuses his left, as they call it."

"What's that?"

"Not let the Johnnies get at him on the left, as long as he can help it. But if he goes charging at them directly they begin to demonstrate a bit and gets rolled over, as he will, you bet. . . ."

"Sure?"

"Oh, yes. They're much stronger than we are in cavalry. And these Usbegs make uncommonly good irregular horse of sorts."

"You're right. I've seen plenty of them, coming through Turkistan."

"Yes; of course you have. I wish I could get through there to Russian territory."

"Well, why shouldn't you?"

"I'm told there's not a chance of the Russians letting any of us through. I shall have a shot, though, I think, when this business is over."

"Gosh! I'm in *luck* coming in for this job. I'll be grateful to that cousin of yours as long as I live."

"Well, I'm very glad to have your company."

"Thank you, mate."

They rode on in silence for awhile. Then the silence was broken by an oath from Ward, as his horse stumbled.

"I was mighty near down then. It's so infernally dark now," he said.

"The sun will be up in a minute or two: go as quietly as you can now. I shall stop those fellows talking." Herbert turned round to his right and spoke a word to his subahdar major, an Usbeg.

"Koob, koob," said the man; he reined in his horse, turned, and cantered down the ranks, over which silence fell black as the night.

"Old Koob-Koob," chuckled Ward half to himself. "He's a good officer that." Into Vanlennert's heart there came a wondrous thrill. He realised fully for the first time the mighty business upon which he was bent. He felt more and more disinclined to talk, but Ward still plied him with whispered questions.

"What regiment were you in when you were in the English army?"

"None: I never was in the army."

"You don't say? How did you have the luck to get this billet, then?"

And Herbert had to tell him the history of a sudden *emeute* in the bazaar at Kabul which had taken place during his second year's residence there: it had nearly cost the Amir's European servants their lives. Then of the courageous conduct of Abd-er-Rahman himself in coming out into the tumult, and how he, Vanlennert, had in his turn saved the Amir's life by cutting down a fanatic Ghazi who was rushing upon him with a drawn krish.

All of a sudden, as he spoke, a flush of pink spread across the hard stony ground, and then it was broad daylight.

Herbert's heart gave an immense throb of welcome to the day, the supreme day of all his life: for so it seemed. Nothing in his past existence was quite real to him when set beside the

sights which now met his eyes, this arid nullah, the vedette in front (grown solid all at once) cutting the sky line, the tramp of the horses that followed: these things seemed to belong to his life and these alone, as if he had been formed for them and they for him since the beginning of time. What were the loves and disappointments of bygone years? Was it possible, for instance, to believe that he had once been greatly elated because he got a book to review? "A book about Eton—I remember it as if it were yesterday"—and his first appearance in Court. He looked back upon these things as Gulliver looked down upon the buildings of Lilliput. Netley and its resounding woods: Gretton and its hoar-frost on the grass: London, its drawing-rooms and its doubtful suburban streets: St. James's Place: all these *had* been—how infinitely small they were! "Yet how could I *prove*," he said to himself, "that I am better engaged in leading a party of Asiatic barbarians along this dull nullah! What's Ishak to me, or Abd-er-Rahman to me? What's Hecuba to me, or I to Hecuba?"

"Yes, yes," he said, joyfully, to himself; "people would say that this view was the dullest in the world: a few yards of stony river-bed, sloping up on either side to make a horizon line; whereas . . ."

Each stone seemed to him more beautiful than an Alpine valley. How blue the shadows had grown now!

"Whew! It's getting warm," grunted Ward.

A tiny sprout of camel-bush—positively the first green thing he had seen since the sun rose. And, by Heaven, a little jerboa. The long-legged, rat-like thing bounded away and hid behind a bit of rock. It was an ecstatic sight; everything was superterrestrial!

"Ah!"

At once a sigh or stifled cry seemed to breathe along the whole rank. For at that moment the throbbing air was struck by a dull, booming sound—another and another followed it. An answering throb passed through every member of the little band, and each man seemed to sit tighter to his horse. Herbert despised himself for having been interested in the blue shadows and in the jerboa. Touching Ward on the arm, he rode a little up the sloping left-hand bank of the nullah, so that they could see over the plain.

"Boom, boom," the sounds went on. The greatest game which is ever played by mankind had begun. Vanlennert spoke another word to his subahdar major, and the men fell

into a walk, making their horses step gingerly among the stones and dry earth. On the right the watercourse was taking them near the base of some hills, and the side of it was steep and rugged.

"If they'd any scouts on the hills they'd see you, and the game would be up," said Ward.

"No, they wouldn't. We can't see the hills, though we're close under them. . . . Oh, those? They couldn't distinguish us from those. Besides, that's ever so much to the rear of their position."

But, though he spoke with confidence, Vanlennert knew that at any moment now the enemy might be aware of his approach. It all depended what Abdullah Khan, his general, was doing with his right. The artillery duel had begun. They could see now quite plainly the great band of smoke which came from the batteries on the enemy's left. And they could hear quite clearly, in the intervals of the firing, the loud, harsh cries from Ishak's army. The smoke lifted, and they caught a glimpse of a great mass of men to the rear of the batteries. Their own men were firing, too; once they distinctly saw a shell explode in the midst of the bank of white smoke. The dull roar, which, in the intervals of louder sounds, reached Herbert's ears, made him think of his first day of pig-sticking at Bhusapore, four years and more ago. Those toy figures that he could distinguish now and again in white turbans and flowing garments! How minute they looked! Could they really be "the enemy," after all? Was this really a battle or only some immense joke? That quaint idea flashed through his mind.

"You'll never get much nearer, unless you come out upon the plain, and I suppose you don't want to do that," Ward said, as they rode slowly on.

"No; not much! And lose all the cover of this ditch! But I shall get more to the flank of that battery. My men are pretty good shots, and if they only knock over a couple of gunners—you'll see. Besides, when the cavalry charge, one wing will advance between us and the battery."

"You seem to have thought it all *out*," said Ward, with a grunt of satisfaction, and they rode on once more in silence.

"What are those fellows behind doing, I wonder?" Herbert said to himself. His men had very nearly got into position now. If Abdullah Khan had pushed on his troops they ought to be getting in touch with his advanced wing. Indeed, they ought not to have opened fire till they were. The continual

booming of the artillery was beginning to affect somewhat everyone's nerves.

"I shall halt here," he said at last; and Mustagh Kahn ("Khoob-Khoob," as Vanlennert and Ward had christened him) passed the word down the ranks. At two words of command half the regiment dismounted by companies.

"You've made them very smart," said Ward.

"In drill." Herbert could not keep a sarcastic intonation out of his voice. The dismounted rifles formed up in the hollow of the dry watercourse. Herbert stood in front of them surveying the field of battle through his glasses.

The moment of moments, the one thing for which he had been brought into the world, was within a few ticks of his watch. The whole thing was so easy, now that they had got so far. As it was, he was sure a volley from his men would dislodge their battery. He could almost, nay, quite, have taken it with his own skirmishers. Only he must know that Abdullah Khan was ready to follow up with a charge. He saw in fancy the loose advancing mass of the Usbeg horse met by a volley from his own rifles; he saw them charged in front by the Amir's horse and rolled back in confusion on the guns; his own men following skirmishing up to the battery; the enemy taken in flank—they would be smashed up even without the help of Gholam's army. The scene was so vivid that the young untried commander could fancy that it had already taken place. The near battery had ceased firing for a moment, and the canopy of smoke lifted to show about a mile behind a small town rising out of the burning plain, its houses and orchards—there was one white dome overtopping all the dim square blocks—wondrously distinct, yet wondrously unreal in that palpitating air. Then, suddenly—whish-u-r-r-e. A sound not unlike the sound of a railway train, only infinitely more rapid—a sound and nothing more passed close above his head. Caught unawares, Vanlennert involuntarily ducked his head.

"I say, you ought not to do that," came from Ward's voice; and Herbert's mind leapt back to full consciousness of what was before him.

"No; what a *damned* fool I was!" he thought, with shame. Half the intense joy he had felt in his position and in all that was happening and all he saw was shorn from him in that one second.

Whish-u-r-r-e. Another shell. He did not duck this time; he had indeed instinctively, as a discipline to himself, advanced

more into the open. The whole aspect of things had changed: the battery was firing at them; and where was Abdullah Khan's supporting force? No matter; they must do what they could for themselves.

"Now," thought Herbert, as he gave his orders. "I have no one to depend upon but myself. I'm perfectly clear as to what I ought to do," and he watched his dismounted men deploying and lying down along the ridge while the other half of the regiment under Khoob-Khoob descended in extended order the nullah to try and regain touch with the main body. How wonderfully like a play it all was, after all! Surely he had been in the whole scene before and knew just what was going to happen!

Yes; he knew that he was going to see emerge out of the smoke as if, so it seemed the first moment, the smoke had turned to something solid, a great white moving mass which stretched out cornerwise rather as—that was the simile that came to him—a shirt upon a clothes-line will get caught by the wind and suddenly stretch out one white tail or arm towards your face. This white mass was a body of cavalry in white turbans and white garments borne on the backs of small brown horses almost the colour of the plain. All this had happened before, precisely as he saw it now; he had given the word of command, fire, precisely as he gave it now; a volley had swept like the crack of some huge whip down the ranks among which he stood. A moment the veil of smoke blotted out all the plain—now he could just see through it—once more the crack of the whip, and then . . .

Another sound from behind him. "Was that in the programme too?" And at the same moment he was struck from behind.

"It's all because I ducked, confound it!" was Herbert's last thought, and he remembered nothing more.

"God! what a pain! I deserve it, whatever it is. I ducked at that first shot. Have they taken me prisoner I wonder? Someone's carrying me on a . . . Oh!" He sank into unconsciousness once more.

A white wall, above it a deep blue sky. The glare was almost too much for his eyes, so he shut them. There was no use in having any more likes or dislikes, however: that was the only thing that remained clear in Herbert's mind. He had

failed to do what he meant to do and it was all his fault, somehow. The only honourable thing left was just to bear whatever came. If that figure, for instance, which got up from a chair against the wall was coming to torture him—why, he must just submit. It did not strike him, at the moment, that Usbegs didn't probably use chairs.

"Well, are ye bbetter?" said a familiar voice.

How queer, Herbert thought, that the Usbeg should talk like Rood!

"Better not talk to him I reckon," said another Usbeg.

But now Vanlennert's reason awoke. "After all, I didn't do anything specially disgraceful," he thought. "There's no reason why I should be killed or tortured. . . ." Yet it was half a disappointment to realise that possibly these two, who talked so like Rood and Ward, might be them and no one else. He turned his head a little and asked, "Where am I?"

"Why, you're in Mazar-i-Shereef, near the site of the ancient Balkh," said Rood, cheerfully, speaking like a cicerone.

"It is you, then?" the other said, languidly.

"Yes, it's me all right. Have a drink?" He brought some sherbet.

Was that all, then? Yesterday he had been another man. The whole of his past life became insignificant beside the moment when he had stood with his troops in the nullah: once more he felt as keenly as at the moment the indescribable thrill when the boom of the first gun struck upon the hot air, and once more there broke upon him through the clearing smoke the vision of that village lying back in the sunlight. And he? Had he done anything disgraceful? No. Anything heroic? Alas! no: not that either. His head felt immensely heavy. He lifted his hand towards it: it was all bound up.

"Don't you touch those bandages," said Rood.

"What's happened?"

"Well, old Ishak's been smashed up—gone off to Russian territory most likely."

"Then it was our firing that I heard: I seemed to be tied fast—for fear I should duck—and I could not open my eyes."

"Didn't you feel yourself being brought here in an *arba*?"

"Yes . . . no."

"I say, he oughtn't to talk like that," Ward put in again.

Herbert shut his eyes: somebody set up a screen of some sort between him and the glaring white wall. . . . All of a sudden, as it seemed to him, it was night; he was in a room, a

very large one such as he was used to, with a roof going up—up. He seemed to see some blue encaustic tiles half-way up the wall: he could not turn his eyes as far as the ceiling. There was scarcely any furniture; he did not notice what was like that there was, but his eyes did rest upon a very common and thoroughly European—German in truth—paraffin lamp.

Rood was still there; he was seated in a deck-chair smoking a pipe and reading a book.

"Where am I?" said Herbert.

"You're in the pallus—one of them, at any rate. Old Gholam himself came in to look at you a while ago. Now he's gone on to try and catch Ishak."

"We weren't beaten, then."

"Not much. Dh' ye see those things there?" and he pointed to a confused heap on the other side of the room. There seemed to be swords and cloths and fruits all mixed up; that, at least, was all that Herbert's confused senses took in. "Those are some of the dollies. The headmen are bringing them in like winking now, you bet. P'raps I oughtn't to talk to ye, though."

"Oh, yes . . . you can."

"Well, I don't suppose it will do ye any harm," and Rood with an air of great relief knocked out his pipe, placed it on the little octagonal table, and advanced his chair to the bed. "I say, isn't it splendid?" he said, crossing and uncrossing his legs. "This is better than pig-sticking any day in the week. Though it's rather a shame the way they've been beheading the prisoners—a damned shame, in fact. I say, who's that fellow Ward? Oh, I forgot you ought not to talk, though."

"Yes—I can. . . . He's a friend of my cousin's. . . . That's all I know."

"That cousin of yours—the long-lost American cousin, you mean?"

"Yes. He came to Kabul . . . and he went . . ."

"I know. Ye told me. He turned up as the long-lost heir or something. Ye ought not to talk. Ward's in the firm I reckon, and he's travelled in Russia, I know that much. But I say, what I was going to tell you was, you know, that he saved your life."

"He did—how?" Herbert half raised himself from his pillow.

"Be quiet, do, or ye'll do yourself a mischief. P'raps I'm wrong in saying he saved your life; anyway, he carried you off when your men began to bolt."

"*My* men—bolted!" Herbert cried out in a still louder voice.

"Well, not altogether," said Rood, soothingly. "They gave whay a bit. They'd had a battery going at um—nobody can stand that long—and Abdullah, by what I understand from Ward, he charged on the wrong side."

"Wrong side?"

"Wrong flank I should have said—no, with the wrong wing. I suppose that was it. I'm new to this, you see, and don't understand all the terms. However," Rood continued in a consoling voice, "we came through the pass before much harm had been done. Oh, your men did very well then. I saw them skirmishing out in fine style."

Rood had been with the supporting force of Gholam Haider.

Thus bit by bit Herbert Vanlennert learned the history of the suppression of Ishak's rebellion. This was in the year 1888, and he had been now three years and a half in Afghanistan.

A fortnight later he was back in Kabul. How strange, he reflected, as he neared the city, that this place should seem now as familiar as home! And he cast back his thoughts to realise what it had looked like when he first saw it lying in its plain, the dark dismantled Balar Hissar frowning above. How squalid the town seemed then at a nearer view! Now—well, it was too familiar for criticism. There were the Asmai Heights looking from where he was, not unlike high downs in England. For Herbert was approaching the Herat Gate. Surely the gate itself looked strange. A nauseous odour, too, assailed his nose. And now he saw that above the gateway and on either side of it was a great pyramid of heads. The most part were now quite stripped of their flesh, but still some black shrunken and grinning heads of flesh could be distinguished in the pile. Feeble as he was, the sight turned him utterly sick; and all the memory of his day in the field was clouded.

"I'm glad I settled to go home next spring," he thought to himself.

CHAPTER LL

"By Jove, the place looks just the same as ever!" It was Herbert Vanlennert who, with a curious wonder, made this ejaculation, as he mounted the staircase to Bertram's old rooms in the Inner Temple.

"Well, old man, how are you?"

"My goodness! It's Vanlennert!"

Both felt that the two friends, who had once seemed so different in years and in attainments and character, met now as equals. Yet Bertram was visibly aged. His back was rounded; the impression of splendid physique which, up to a year or two ago, he had possessed in despite of his student's life, was gone now—gone by the little touch which is everything.

The usual questions and answers followed.

"Well, how long have you been back?"

"Since Tuesday."

"Overland?"

"No; sea all the way. I'm pretty hard up."

"I'm sorry for that. But I hope you've had a good time."

"By Jove, I should just think I had!"

"Take a pipe and tell me all about it."

"That would take a month's hard talking," Herbert said, taking out his pipe and his pouch.

"Any way, you've been in Afghanistan all the time, haven't you?" Bertie nodded as he sucked at his pipe. "Why haven't you written to me for a year or more?"

"Why haven't you to me, if you come to that?" Bertram knew there was a reason why his correspondence with his friend had received a check (he had not written much or at much length after the Kitty imbroglio); but he had forgotten the reason by this time.

"The fact is," Vanlennert went on, "one does get out of the habit of writing out there, there's no doubt of that. Though, I suppose, I shall have to write a book about it now."

"Oh, I wouldn't do *that*!" said Bertram, in a mock-dolorous voice.

Herbert laughed. "Oh, not from any damned literary ambition. I got rid of that long ago. But it's this way. I've been in the Amir's service, as you know . . ."

The elder man nodded.

"Well, I got a chance of seeing a lot of the border tribes, the chaps up by the Hindu Kush and right on to the Pamir plains. By Jove, we had stunning fun! The fighting, I'm bound to say, was rather beastly in some ways. It was last year that I went as an agent from the Amir to some of the frontier tribes. After that the Indian Government sent an agent there. I gave them a lot of help; though, of course, they didn't say much about that; they couldn't, as I'm not a public servant; but Frazer thanked me afterwards, and so did Lord Dufferin. But the British public don't know or care anything about these things, nor, for that matter, the Indian Government at home. And it's no use our trying to get hold of these chaps if the people at home go and give themselves away to the Russians. . . ."

"I see; write away, then."

"Besides, there's more in it than that. It's really all owing to a friend of mine called Rood. I should like you to know him; you'd appreciate him; he's one of the most all-round chaps I ever came across. He's in the Amir's service now—however, it doesn't matter about that. He's been writing to the Indian papers, and it was really he who got the British agent sent to Chitrâl.

"Where's that?"

Bertie stared for a moment, as if such ignorance on the part of a man whom he had once regarded as an encyclopædia of knowledge was scarcely credible.

"A bit of territory that lies between us and the Hindu Kush. The great thing was that we should get there before the Russians did and stop the passes. . . ."

"Yes, I understand that. I remember now that there was an article about it all in the *Fortnightly* or somewhere."

"Well, that was Rood's. It began with his letters to the *Pioneer*, though. It's a queer thing," Vanlennert went on, "that Rood, who's quite fit to be a regular literary man, which I'm not—I mean, for instance, that he can translate the Vedas and all that sort of thing—can't do anything like journalism; so I had to help him: it all seemed to come back to me when I set to work hard."

But at this point Bertie Vanlennert suddenly checked himself. "By the way," he said, "I've not heard your news. Is the *magnum opus* out yet?"

Over Bertram's face there passed a certain shadow. But he only answered, "No; not yet."

"I believe I understand something about metaphysics now," said the other, smiling. "It's a curious thing that Sadler, who's a tremendously practical chap, when he's nothing particular to do reads metaphysics and that sort of thing. He knew your name quite well." Bertram made no reply, and the other continued, musingly, "I used to think it the most awful rot."

"And do still, I daresay," said Bertram, not without a touch of his ancient contempt for people who passed judgment on what they did not understand.

But Bertie was less sensitive to that contempt than he used to be. He continued musing; then suddenly he said, "You gave me awfully good advice, though, about finding something to do which I didn't think rot. I don't suppose you remember."

"Yes; I think I do."

"I remember that conversation as if it was yesterday," Herbert went on, scarcely waiting for the reply. "I often thought of it afterwards—'what seems real to you'—that was how you put it. . . ." He mused again for a moment, and then suddenly changed the subject of conversation once more.

"How awfully sad it was Maynard dying in that way!"

"Oh, it was," said Bertram, in a moved voice.

"Kitty, what became of her? What an awfully pretty child she used to be!"

"Well, she's in London. You'd better go and see her."

"Oh, I will. Are they . . . I suppose Mrs. Maynard is rather badly off, eh?"

"Ye-s—she is. They don't live in London."

"They don't? Is Kitty here alone, then?" Herbert contracted his eyebrows slightly as he spoke. It did not seem right somehow.

"Yes; she's earning her living."

"Oh, dear!" He said this in a voice of such commiseration that Bertram could not help laughing.

"It's what a good many girls have to do, you know," he said.

"Do they? Well, yes; but . . ."

"But I suppose you've adopted all the Anglo-Indian conventionalities."

"Oh, no, it's not that. . . . Well, I suppose I have rather," Herbert said, after a moment of reflection. "Do you remember that girl who used to come here?"—he looked round the room as he spoke nothing seemed altered—yes, the one space of free wall behind the door was now likewise filled with books—"Julia—was it?—Violet . . ."

"Violet Fisher. Oh, yes; she's married now. Mrs. Fisher-Pearson is what she calls herself. Kitty's her secretary."

"Is she *really*!" Bertie's tone was still less enthusiastic. "I must say that sort of thing does seem rubbish to you when you've been out there."

"What sort of thing do you mean?"

"Well, women writing and all that."

Bertram laughed once more. "Oh, I grant you," Herbert went on, "they are prejudiced over there tremendously—hide-bound to any extent. But still somehow they do get things done. Here they only get them talked about."

"That's what you want to do with your book at any rate, and I hope you'll succeed."

"Thanks; well, I hope I shall. But I expect you want to work now. It's no end jolly seeing you again, anyhow. Come and dine with me to-night at the club, will you? I've got a lot more to tell you. I'm going down to Derbyshire to-morrow or next day. I'm turned out of house and home for one thing. I mean for good this time."

"No; really?"

"Yes; fact. I'll tell you all about it."

"How odd," thought Vanlennert as he walked away, "that I should talk of it in that way now!" He remembered the time when it had seemed the great misfortune of his life.

"Those little chaps have a way of falling on their feet and getting on. . . . I remember once saying that to myself about Vanlennert. How marvellously he's changed in these four or five years!" Edward Bertram made these reflections rather ruefully. His *magnum opus* was not yet complete. Why? Because he had given so much time of late to reviewing and press-work. He had felt ashamed, he said to himself, of never earning any money. But that shame had never come upon him before one day, in Maynard's empty studio, when Kitty was sitting at his side. (Bertram had told Vanlennert that Kitty was earning her living; but, in truth, he filled up liberally the margin between the moderate salary that Mrs. Pearson gave her secretary and what the secretary herself considered a living wage.)

Sic vos non vobis vellera fertis oves.

This not very new quotation was the last item in Bertram's train of thought.

At Gretton Rectory there was a long, smooth lawn stretching in front of the drawing-room and the study windows. You caught your first view of it at the right of you, when you came round the curve of the little drive from the white gate.

It sent off a spur into the plantation, which ran along all the west side of the garden, and in that corner of velvet green stood the great *arbor-vitæ*. On the left of the drive stood, not a plantation, but a group of really fine elms in which rooks built: even now they were coming cawing home. A green path led behind them and under a high brick wall to the kitchen-garden.

It was more wonderful than a dream to find these things standing where they had always stood.

"The rector's just round by the green walk, I think, sir," the housemaid had said. And Herbert turned back and took that path.

He found Uncle George kneeling before one of his bee-hives. John Kemp stood by holding a large pail. They both had veils over their hats and Uncle George's hands were gloved. But when he looked up and saw Bertie, he left his occupation for a moment and jumped up to greet his nephew.

"Well, well!" he said, shaking Bertie's hand warmly. "This is capital. Does Molly know you've come? You didn't let us know what train you were coming by, or we should have sent to meet you. How are you, my dear Bertie? You look older.

"Now, I'm just going to turn out my bees from this hive. I think you'd better not come too close.—Oh, is there?—Well, there's another veil here, perhaps you would like to put it on." Herbert did this; and his uncle went on to explain what he was about. "You see, I have to tap the hive," he said. "John stands there with a pail to catch them as they come out."

"Aren't you afraid of getting stung?" said Bertie to John Kemp, who had no gloves.

"Oh, no, Master Bertie," he said, with a note of contempt. The bees were now swarming about Herbert's veil and crawling upon his nose; do what he would, he could not help wincing now and then.

"You've only got to bide quite still; they'll do ye no harm," John said, looking round once from his work.

"What a tremendous lot! How many are there there, do you suppose?" Bertie bent over his uncle's shoulder to look into the pail.

"About ten thousand," replied Uncle George.

"By Jingo, a regular army!"

"Yes, if they chose to attack me or you. It's curious, John; I don't see the queen. Ah! there she is!" And with a quill Uncle George pushed the queen-bee into the pail, and John at once covered it up, leaving only a little aperture. Then through that small opening all the other bees came swarming.

As soon as this business was over, Uncle George stood up and took off his veil. "I shall want you to get me those espaliers ready by to-morrow morning," he still went on to John. Then he took Bertie by the arm and said, "Now you must come, and we'll find your aunt and Molly. That is to say, your aunt is sure to be in the drawing-room." And his voice dropped as he said this.

"How is Aunt Marion?" said Bertie.

"Ah, well," said Uncle George, with a sigh, "she's about the same. That is to say, rather better, we hope. Cantray thought her decidedly better last week." His tone had recovered almost all its former cheerfulness. "I won't ask you," he went on, as they approached the house, "to tell me what you've been doing besides what you told us in your letters—they were very interesting, some of your letters; that Amir must be a clever barbarian—because your aunt and Molly won't want to lose any of it."

And Bertie on his part was not the least anxious to begin talking of his Asiatic experiences. They seemed to be beside the mark. The proper occupation of a man here below was the grafting of apple-trees, the watching of rooks returning home of an evening, and the superintendence of innumerable swarms of bees.

Yet this coming back of his did not seem quite natural, somehow. Was there not something strange, a sort of embarrassment in his uncle's manner, behind its heartiness? Certainly, too, he did not look well nor happy when he laid aside his *empressement*.

Molly came rushing forward, holding out both her hands. "Oh, this is splendid!" she said, and kissed Bertie, a thing she had very seldom done in her life. Then she blushed vividly. Uncle George looked on in a rather sad abstraction.

They all three went to the house together.

Just as they got to the front door the rector said—

"The new people haven't come into Netley yet."

"Oh, I didn't know anything about new people. The Tenants aren't there, then?"

Uncle George's eyes opened with surprise. "You didn't know that Edmund had sold the place?" he said.

Bertie felt as if he had been detected in some shameful act. He stammered in his reply. "N—no," he said, "not precisely. I knew that Edmund intended to sell it."

A greyness spread over the rector's face. "Yes," was all he said. "It's sold." And nothing, to one who understood what Netley had been to him, to all the Vanlennerts of his generation, could have been more tragic than those three words spoken in as calm a voice as possible without an audible sigh. "To a Mr. Parkstone," he went on, rousing himself. "I see," and he turned to Molly as he spoke, "they're not Americans; at least, he is an Englishman. She's a Canadian, daughter of that enormously rich man—I forget his name—who had to do with the Erie and Ontario Railway."

"Ah!" said Molly. Uncle George relapsed into silence.

"Well," said Mrs. Vanlennert, half raising herself from her sofa, "the conquering hero is at home again at last! What a lot you will have to tell us!"

Bertie kissed her while she was speaking.

There was a curious *gêne* on all present. And Bertie began to realise in what a different aspect he must appear now to his relations from that in which he had shone when he left. If they did not precisely—and certainly not consciously—grudge him the sort of deference they had paid in past years to the squire of Netley, all that was now known about his birth must make a difference to such people as Uncle George and Aunt Marion. He had a moment ago been picturing himself staying at Gretton an indefinite time, seeing all his old friends, working hard at his book, which was promised for January next. Would that be possible now?

The very servants, he thought, John Kemp, himself, looked at him with changed eyes—not less friendly, perhaps, but—changed. Only Molly remained the same..

In the morning Herbert and Molly went for an immense ramble round to Hatherley Bottom, to the Brawl Valley, and up again into the Netley woods from that side. In the course of it Bertie paused beside a gate and a low stone wall where he and Charlie Orcher had once eaten their lunch on such a morning as this and looked over Hillyard's farm.

"It looks different somehow," he said.

"Well, it's all grass now, for one thing," replied his cousin.

"Ah, that's it. Is Hillyard still there?"

"No, no, I'm sorry to say. He couldn't keep up the farm. There was some lawsuit, as well, about his wife's money. But he'd been losing money for some years before that."

Then they passed on. In the valley and on the road towards the woods the blackberries were a-ripening and their leaves began to show great crimson patches. The pheasants, untouched as yet, ran along beside the hedges, or clucked from warm, safe places among the leaves. The bracken was yellow in parts; that group of trees which stood out above the others had a burnt look.

Through a little gate they turned into the wood itself. What a wilderness of fallen leaves!—Herbert noted all these common things now, for now they all seemed strange—A whole subsoil made by generations of these leaves falling one over the other. And Herbert thought of the road they had just left, and how, through the centuries, there had staggered and snarled down it hundreds of huge wains dragging mighty trees, which scraped along the roadway and echoed in the woody recesses. Those trees had all been carried, all those leaves had fallen for the benefit of the Vanlennert family, which, and he with them, must now say good-bye to all this for ever. The gurgling laughter of a woodpecker took up the same tale. And presently, as Herbert was looking round him, a tiny head appeared from the middle of the leaves, ten yards in front of them. It looked like the head of a beast upon the body of a serpent, so astonishingly lithe and long was the neck, and no more than the neck was visible. The thing emerged so gnome-like from the ground that Bertie's thoughts—he had held a hand to stop his cousin—flew off at a tangent to the vision of the Indian fakir the day nearly five years ago when he had driven with Captain Jerningham from Humayunabâd to Magaon Sandri.

And now the neck emerged farther. Two tiny feet followed, and soon the long, quaint body of a weasel appeared complete. The creature set off on its bounding way for a few yards, and then disappeared once more beneath the roots of a beech.

"Stop: don't move," whispered Molly, and slightly nodded her head before her.

Then might be seen ten yards or so from the first hole a dormouse, perhaps the rightful inhabitant of the burrow. It was returning home quickly and had something in its mouth.

But whether some subtle sense warned it of the nearness of its enemy, or that it only saw the two human beings beside its home it stopped suddenly, sitting up quaintly on its haunches in a moment; then it turned and, without undue haste, hopped back the way it came.

"All these things were once mine and I knew it not," Herbert said to himself. The big things of the forest, all those that had relation to sport, he had learnt something of their ways of life: but these small denizens called vermin had had no existence for him in old times.

As he was making these reflections, a heavy sigh came from his companion.

"It's very dreadful," said Molly.

"Netley being sold? Yes, it is. I find out now that . . ."

But here he paused; for he saw a look in Molly's eyes, a mingled look—shame to herself that she had invoked the recollection of a matter which was so personal to him that he should even when with her affect to ignore it, and yet something of surprise and half reproach to him for doing so. All this was in her face.

"Of course it's worse for me even than that," he said.

"Yes, dear Bertie. I did not mean to talk of it. It came out."

"Oh, I don't mind talking about it now. It's years since I found out."

"Is it, really? But how?"

"Well . . ." he paused. "I found out, or as good as found out, from Lady More. You remember her. She was the most awful brick you ever knew;" and Herbert's voice trembled, for the loss of his old friend was only of one year's standing.

"Ah! I wish I had seen her again. And she knew?—how wonderful!"

"Not everything; no, not that. But we put one thing and another together, and at last it all came out. That is to say, I was *almost* sure—but I didn't like to . . . You know I'm a year older than I am supposed to be. I'm thirty-one now."

"Yes, yes, you told me that in your letter." Molly spoke with a catching of the breath.

"And the rum thing is that Edmund knew it, or as good as knew it, all the time. That shows that he's a much better chap than we used to think."

"It does indeed. You told me that too. But *why* has he sold it, then?" (And there was a note almost of agony in

Molly's "why.") "You can't think what a blow it has been to father."

"Well, I can guess. . . . Edmund's an awfully rum chap. He hasn't a scrap of sentiment—or even of feeling, you might say. But there's something fine in his independence."

"But he wasn't too independent to take a lot of money from his family," said Molly, hotly. "That's what I can't get over; nor father either."

"But then, you see, if he thought he'd a right to the whole lot. . . ."

"Yes," said Molly, hesitatingly; "I see that."

"Besides, I say he's a fellow you can't understand till you've seen him. He had his fling, then just disappeared and came up smiling."

"He ought not to take it from you after all these years."

"I wouldn't have kept it."

"Ah, well, don't let's talk any more about it. Of course it's worse for you than for any one else," and Molly gave her cousin's arm a kind and gentle pressure.

"You're quite as much of a brick as Lady More," said Bertie.

CHAPTER LII.

IN their flat amid the wilds of Bayswater were seated Mary Beeston, the principal tenant, and her friend Kitty Maynard. They were at—considered morally—the principal meal of their day, five o'clock tea, and were discussing, in a desultory way, the subject which is believed to be the most interesting which our terrene life offers.

"I expect I shall end by marrying Steenie Armstrong," said Miss Beeston.

"He's very clever, isn't he?" said Kitty, as she took some sugar.

"Oh, very; I don't know why I don't like him more than I do. I suppose because we've known each other all our lives."

"Yes; I think that is rather . . ."

"I don't. Of course to sentimental people it may be—a drawback or something, you were going to say. I don't go in for being sentimental. He does rather in reality. . . . You're sentimental I know," she added.

"No, I'm *not*," replied Kitty, feeling indignant.

"Then you ought to be. At your age it's different. You're several years younger than I am."

"I think it's all silly. People ought to have too much to do to be sentimental."

"You get those ideas from the *Womanhood* set," said Mary, loftily. They were just the ideas which, on another occasion, she might herself have proclaimed.

"I don't."

Mary Beeston looked hard at her companion. "It's very odd," she said. "Haven't you really got any one you're the least bit gone on . . . ? And yet," she added, after a pause, "you're much better looking than I am."

"Oh, I'm not, Mary." Kitty was furious with herself for not being able to help blushing under the compliment.

"Well, you're younger," said Mary, tolerantly. "Only now-a-days young girls don't go down so well as they used. Still, it's stupid being such a hermit as you are."

Kitty made no immediate reply, but sat looking abstractedly at the window. The last glow of sunlight came slantingly into the room. Kitty Maynard was noting the exact shades which it made upon their blind, how it turned a geranium-leaf from green to yellow; and then again how there was above the sill a purple strip like a line of distant mountains. Kitty knew that, in fact, it was only made by the slate roofs of houses; but her thoughts were so utterly bent on the simple effect of colour, that she practically forgot whether she were looking at mountains or no.

"If I could be an artist," she said, half to herself, "I shouldn't care about anything else."

"Oh, I expect you would. One always thinks one would like to be something different." Mary Beeston, whose own existence was completely independent of "musts," though she worked hard in her way, sat on eccentric committees and wrote spasmodically in many different directions—took somewhat strict views of work and duty; and Kitty had often confessed to being idle at her office.

Then the elder girl—a girl by courtesy, perhaps—got up. "Dear me! I'm sorry I've got to go out again," she said, with a yawn.

"I don't suppose you are, really."

"Yes, I am. Oh, I get quite as much dining out as I want to. The Wentworths—well, one meets clever people there, cer-

tainly. By the way, Mrs. Wentworth was asking if you were still with me; she wants me to bring you again, some evening. She's rather mashed by you."

"Very well; I'll go."

"I wish it wasn't a dinner to-night. Then we could go together."

"No; I've got some work to do to-night."

"Proofs?"

"Yes."

"You take such a *time* over them. I polish mine off in no time."

"I *have* to do them properly. I'm paid for that. Je suis . . . payée pour cela." Kitty generally hesitated a little over the smallest quotation in a foreign language.

"Of course; and I do mine properly."

This was true in the main, Kitty Maynard reflected, when a few minutes later she sat down alone in her own little room. She was fearfully slow compared to other people. Then she began to think passionately—as she did at least once every day—of what it might be if she could *only* get a clear year to work at her painting. It was the one hope and wish of her life. During the month's holiday she spent at home it absorbed all her thoughts and nearly all her time; and the reaction was fearful when, as now, she had come back once more to the routine of the editor's office of *Womanhood*. Mary was a most exhausting person to meet, after a long absence. Everything about her was in her own view just what it ought to be. In defiance of spelling, she insisted that she was of the family of Mary Beaton, "the Queen's Mary," and, though she was not romantic about other people, saw herself in a romantic light in their eyes. Everything else that she chose to think of her belongings and accomplishments was arranged upon the same relationship between evidence and belief; yet this very self-confidence helped to create the success it claimed. How odd, Kitty reflected, that Mary, who was no more than nice-looking and was nearly thirty, should look forward with the utmost confidence to marrying when she chose, and that she, Kitty Maynard, with all her good looks, should have practically excluded this from her programme of life. There was no one she wanted to marry; but no unmarried woman hears another talk glibly of entering the nuptial state without a prick of envy.

That morning at the office had been a bad one: Kitty had

been *distracte* ; all her book-knowledge—which she had acquired with such labour and difficulty—down to her very knowledge of spelling, seemed to have forsaken her during the holidays, and she had been hauled over the coals by Violet Pearson, a thing she resented keenly.

During the four years which had passed since the terrible opening of her life Kitty had acquired an outward armour of roughness and of cynicism. The latter quality, indeed, was in danger of eating deeply into her character. For what tends to cynicism more than the discovery that irreparable misfortunes have come upon you as the result rather of your virtues than of your faults?

How naïve she had been in old days ! How strange, for instance, was the way in which she had known without knowing Ionë Churton's character and doings ! Ionë had never suffered, because she had never committed the supreme sin of being found out. Kitty's former friend had long been married now : her reputation had not been before or after marriage of the best. But she and Fred Yeames Munn got along on a basis of mutual toleration. Kitty had heard something of this since, and had guessed more than she had heard, from what a wider knowledge had taught her to see that Ionë had been in the days when they had been friends. Was not that enough to make a cynic of a saint ? And her own shames and her own terrors—Ionë would have made nothing of them. These terrors had been, in fact, wholly without foundation : the shames partly so.

Yet Kitty, because of her wider knowledge, did not the less writhe under the shame. An eternal shame it seemed, due to the villainy of the sons of Adam, with (Alas ! deep in her soul that, too, had to be confessed sometimes) some aid from the baleful curiosity of Eve.

Time had, of course, cicatrised the wound. Kitty lived a new life and had a new set of friends. She was as much of a hermit as Mary Beeston said. Still, she did go out. London had not, as she was apt to fancy, rung with her history : there were no incontrovertible facts to lay hold of : the story had sunk to be a vague reminiscence and a rumour, confined to a small number of people, most of whom never saw Miss Maynard now. And there were many more who, like the Wentworths, knew her only as the daughter of a painter they had once much admired, who had been sadly cut off before he had touched the meridian of his power, and whose fame even these few years had begun to coat with rust. The Wentworths were

the owners of the earliest of Maynard's three great pictures, "The Cider-Makers." For long stretches of time, therefore, Kitty's life flowed evenly if not too lightly. The one beacon of hope which cheered her onwards was her growing, slowly-growing success in her efforts to paint. When as now these efforts had brought a reaction of despair and all the pettiness of her office work unrolled itself through a vista of years, then, too, the flood-gates of memory would open and the stream threaten to overwhelm her. At this moment, as Kitty Maynard sat alone in her tiny room, her thoughts were mournful as falling ashes in a cold grate.

The advantages that Kitty got by living with Mary Beeston were immense. Formerly she had had but one room in a set of chambers let to women only, to which was attached a common dining-room. There she had made acquaintance with her present companion; and when Mary, who, though she had much better rooms, soon got to dislike what she called the "Cat's Cradle," took a flat in the wilds of Bayswater, she persuaded Kitty to migrate too, and let off two little rooms cheap to her friend. Mary kept a maid, who did to a large extent for both.

But there were counterpoises. Kitty was not so independent as she used to be. Though she imitated her companion, and sometimes outdid her model, in roughness of speech, she had to compromise in other ways. Now she heard a knock at the door; she knew that Davis would never go to it while she was engaged in dressing her mistress, so Kitty Maynard opened it herself. She beheld a man's figure on the landing directly under the gas-jet.

"Do you want . . .?" Kitty began.

"Miss Maynard . . ." the other answered. "Why, you're Kitty . . ."

Wonder of wonders! Had that soundless cry for help and that appeal to Providence which Kitty had uttered but now produced this answer? For the man had moved so that the gaslight fell on his face. And the voice, too!

"Oh, Bert . . .!" Kitty began, with almost a cry—"Mr. Vannert!"

And once more she felt the thrill of a warm, friendly man's grasp.

"The other beginning was the right one," said Herbert. "I shall call you Kitty, anyway."

Still inwardly trembling a little, Kitty led the way into her room. To Herbert it seemed so tiny that there was not

room for his hat as well as himself. "Shall I put my hat on one of the pegs I saw?" he said, for the sake of saying something; and when he came back, "Do you live here all by yourself?"

"I and another girl share a set."

"Oh!"

There was something vaguely disapproving. Kitty flushed with momentary anger. "Well, never mind about that," she said. By this time she had lighted her gas, for it was getting dark.

"Well, you see I've come back," Herbert said.

Kitty beamed once more. "Oh, yes, and was it . . . are you glad to be back?" she said, looking her interlocutor in the face for the first time.

"My goodness, what eyes she has!" thought Herbert, and out loud, "It's awfully jolly seeing one's friends again," he said, with emphasis. "You're all right, I see. I saw Bertram when I was in town before."

"Oh, you've been back some time, then!" Involuntarily there crept a note of disappointment and almost reproach into her voice.

"Not in London: I went down into Derbyshire . . ."

"Oh, of course."

"No; you're about the second person I've seen in London yet."

"That's very kind; I'm going to make some tea."

"And your people, your mother, how is she?" Bertie was helping her to manage the kettle and their hands touched. Each time he spoke his voice became more nearly tender. All sorts of memories were flashing through his mind: of the last he had seen of Maynard; of all the trouble he had anticipated for this child. And to think that he had been far away when it came and been able to do nothing to help! Well, he must make up now.

"They're living in Norwich."

There was a pause. "It seems rum," said Herbert Vanlennert, "your living here by yourself."

"Yes; but I *couldn't* stay there." Kitty spoke wistfully.

"No . . .? Of course, it must have been dull after London."

"Oh, it wasn't only that!" All of a sudden Kitty realised how impossible it would be to explain all her circumstances and motives to this old friend; a weight descended on her heart.

"Well, I'm not going to find fault with you for coming to live in town, I can tell you. It saves me a journey to Norwich."

"That's very polite."

"One isn't polite to one's old friends." There was all the softness of the returned exile in his voice.

Kitty coloured once more and sought refuge in her tea-cups. "I should so like to hear all you've been doing," she said, as she handed him his tea.

"I've been doing a good lot. I haven't written as often to anyone as I ought to have done. I made all sorts of good resolutions when I went out."

"Yes; you said you had got out of writing letters; I quite understood that."

("How grown-up she is compared to what she used to be! and seems nicer, too, in some ways.") "But I should like most to hear what you've been doing," Herbert said, out loud.

"Oh, that's silly! Of course we've been doing nothing but live, and you've had all sorts of adventures."

"Yes; but for the last six weeks I've done nothing but tell them to different people."

"Ah, well . . . but you might tell me something."

"Oh, yes, I will, and another day, too: if you don't object to my coming now and then." ("By Jove, what looks she can give! I wonder if any other chaps come to call on her like this. I don't half like the idea of it. That beggar Bertram is hardly fit to look after a girl like that.")

"Well, go on," said Kitty.

"Let me see, I know I told you about my first going out . . . and then about that row in Kabul, and the fight in the bazaar."

"Yes, that must have been dreadful," Kitty said, shuddering.

Bertie told her of his being made a colonel of the Amir's horse after the *émeute*. And then how he had organized a corps of mounted infantry. Presently—

"Would you like to smoke?" his companion said. "Uncle Ned does."

"If you're sure you won't mind, I'll just light a cigarette. . . . No; I don't think I will. It must be a nuisance in such a little room."

"You're always talking about the smallness of my room," said Kitty, with a touch of impatience.

"I beg your pardon; yes, it was rather cheek. One forgets that people grow up."

"You can smoke, really, if you like; Mary Beeston does."

"Who's she?"

"My friend who lives in this flat."

"No; does she, really?"

"Yes; and I should if I liked it; only I don't."

But Herbert Vanlennert was ruminating over a fixed idea.

"Bertram's rather a rum chap," he began.

"Oh, he's so kind; you can't think how kind he's been to me."

"Oh, I know he's one of the best fellows out. What I meant was only that he's rather—I mean he doesn't know very much of the world, don't you know?"

"No more do I, and I don't want to."

"Yes; that's all very well in theory. . . . Do you see much of Mrs. Ayntree now?"

"Not very much."

"I suppose it's just what she'd approve of, your living in London like this. . . . And your other people, what do they say?"

"Why shouldn't I . . . ? My mother? Well, she lets me."

"No; I meant . . . Haven't you another guardian? Yes; you told me, Churton . . ."

"Uncle Tom?" A dryness came into Kitty's throat as she said this name.

"Yes; what does he say?"

Kitty's momentary instinctive fear gave way to irritation. In her long familiarity with a secret, anything like cross-questioning soon became too much for her nerves. It seemed part of a conspiracy of the whole world not to let her past be buried.

"You've no right to go on telling me I ought to go away. Mr. Vanlennert," she said; and as she spoke she involuntarily rose to dismiss her guest.

At that moment the door opened. "Of course I've got my key," said some one behind Herbert. . . . "Oh, I beg your pardon."

It came as a welcome interruption. Vanlennert knew he had been impertinent. But he resented Kitty's tone of revolt, and would have found it hard to apologize. This child had once belonged to him so utterly; he did not like to think that all that might well have changed.

Now he took his leave. "Well," he said, holding Kitty's

hand very tightly for half a minute, "you'll let me come again, some day?"

"Oh, yes," and the tears suddenly came into Kitty's eyes.

"It's no end jolly finding one's old friends again."

"Thank you." Kitty could not look up. She felt that she was rapidly becoming sixteen once again.

"Have you any days when you're most likely to be in?"

Kitty told her engagements. Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays she hurried off to a night drawing class. Fridays they worked on till six at the office.

"I say, you mustn't overdo it, you know." And with that he went.

Looking back on the past, as he did on his way to dine at the club, Vanlennert realised, as he had never done before, how in the old days his word was law to little Kitty Maynard; it seemed only right and proper that he should reassert and regain his old position.

"She's uncommonly pretty," he said to himself over his evening pipe. "Not quite as pretty as I thought she would be, perhaps; but still . . . seems nice too . . . I ought to marry some of these days. . . . What a fool I've been with my life! . . . I've muddled the whole thing somehow . . . and here am nearly as poor as ever. . . . Rose Abernethy wasn't a bad girl—Rose Pringle. What a name! I used to have queer quixotic sorts of ideas. My life's been too active for that sort of thing of late."

Kitty did not talk to herself in such an open way. But she tossed feverishly on her bed and could not sleep. Was there not here some wonderful design of Providence, going at last to make up to her for her unjust sufferings? . . . She only wanted a friend—she so friendless in the world. . . . And this man had always seemed different from all other men. But still a dread weighed her down; was she going to abandon her new self and her new interests and go back to that dark and terrible region where love reigned? Oh, no; *that* was not to be thought of. How he had seemed to want to pry into her past!

CHAPTER LIII.

"WHO will succeed Lord Tennyson now?" said Mrs. Wentworth to the general.

"Succeed him? Why, his son," replied Sir Francis Savage.

"Ha, ha! how witty you are!"

Sir Francis stared; then he restored his attention to his *vol-au-vent*.

"Who do you say, Mr. Vanlennert?"

But Herbert did not answer. His attention was arrested by what Lionel Wentworth, on the opposite side of the table, was saying to his neighbour, Miss Maynard.

"That place on the hill? Oh, it's a lady's college, I fancy—or a lunatic asylum. I'm sure I forget which," Wentworth was saying.

"They are nearly the same, perhaps, you think?"

"I should call one the disease and the other the remedy."

"Yes, *il pense à tout, ce bon M. Holliday*. I know he did build both somewhere in that neighborhood. Didn't that hill look jolly as we were . . ." Herbert heard no more, because Mrs. Wentworth was speaking to him again.

"Why hasn't India produced a poet?" she said.

"Well, it has of sorts; there's Sir Arthur Lansdell."

"Yes, yes," interposed another speaker. "But I often wonder, with you, why there has been no great epic upon our deeds in India—a Mahabharāta of the British rule."

"Mahabhārata," said Herbert, almost below his breath.

"I suppose we never do pronounce Indian names rightly," said Mrs. Wentworth to him on the right.

"There's something for you to try your hand on, Bloxam," the former speaker concluded.

"An epic, my dear Marston? The day of epics is dead."

"How can you say so," said Mrs. Wentworth, "when there's that delightful *Epic of the Tomb* of Laurie Pelly's?"

"You don't really admire that, Mrs. Wentworth?"

"Ah," said Marston, "you were asking who would be in the running for the laureateship when Tennyson died: there you are."

"Good heaven! Even your friend, the Grand Old Man,

could not perpetrate such a monstrosity as that, if he were in power then."

"The stars in their courses are fighting against him," said Lionel Wentworth to Kitty, glancing across the table at Bloxam, the fat poet, whose hands hung down before him like a seal's flappers.

"Against Mr. Laurie Pelly?"

"By the stars in the courses, I mean, literary lions at dinner."

Kitty laughed.

"It's the fashion to abuse the *Epic of the Tomb*. All the same, I heard Arnold—the American novelist, I mean—saying at dinner at Balliol last year that there was something—in it which reminded him of Michelangelo."

"Does he really talk like that?"

"Only as all Americans do; I daresay I overdid it."

"There's something in it," Kitty said, reverting back, "which reminds me of Titian's 'Assumption.'"

"That's the 'assumption,' I suppose?"

Kitty nodded.

"By Jove, she's as clever as she is beautiful," said young Oxford—young graduate Oxford—to himself. "She seemed so awfully shy that other time at the river party." And he felt his heart beat inside his waistcoat.

In truth, Kitty Maynard was lifted out of herself that night. All her reserve and suspicion had for this while vanished into air, and with a vast rebound her ancient gaiety and the germs of wit in her came back. There was not a man at table who did not feel his eyes attracted to her from time to time. Mrs. Wentworth, who was a very good-hearted woman, was, in the midst of other conversation, slowly making up her mind that if Lion really wished . . .

"Is there such a thing as an epic in native India, Mr. Vannennert?" she said, turning towards Herbert again. "A modern one, I mean," she added, seeing, by the other's look of surprise, that she had said something outrageous—"a quite modern thing such as Mr. Marston was talking about."

"I don't know much about India, you see; I lived in Afghanistan. *There* there is . . . of sorts."

"No, really?"

"I mean there's a kind of ballad poetry, which I suppose is the germ of epic, isn't it?"

"Decidedly," said Marston, in his high voice, nodding his

head in a condescending way. "But, now, is there any sort of rhapsodists who go about reciting, improvising these poems from house to house?"

"Not so much from house to house . . ."

"Well, in the houses of the chiefs I mean," put in Marston.

"As in the bazaars," Herbert went on, after a moment's pause of recollection. "Yes; it's very curious to see them, in the middle of a circle or semicircle, intoning these ballads; you can't call it singing . . ."

"And you understand them?" interposed Mrs. Wentworth. "How interesting!"

"Most interesting," said Marston, leaning forward; and all the people at that end of the table murmured assent.

"I wonder if you'd care to hear . . ." Lionel Wentworth began to Kitty. But he saw that her attention was absorbed by the speaker at the end of the table.

"They get awfully excited over it, work themselves up into a most frightful rage, and the people round about reply from time to time by repeating the last words. Sometimes, though, they stopped when they saw me."

"And what are the subjects of the ballads?"

"That's just it. Things about the Afghan war as often as not, and awful cheek to us very often."

"Who is that chap?" said young Wentworth to his neighbour in a low voice. "Mary Beeston brought him here one . . ."

"Hush!" said Kitty, who had flushed angrily.

"Mr. Vanlennert," Mrs. Wentworth was explaining to Sir Francis Savage (he had never served in India), "has been all over Afghanistan, to places where Europeans have never been before."

"Ah, yes," said the general, looking across his hostess. "Did you see any signs of the Russians there? I don't believe our people know the least bit in the world what they are doing on that frontier."

And apparently Sir Francis revived this question after the ladies had gone; for he was still upon it or something analogous when the gentlemen came up to the drawing-room. Kitty, though her back was turned and though she was replying to a question about her father's drawings, felt as if she knew exactly in what fashion this entry was made.

"I know we found that in Africa," Sir Francis was saying, as

he held Herbert by the arm. "You might have supposed that they'd a private telegraph."

"Oh, yes, that, of course, is quite inexplicable."

"Ah!" Kitty detected with joy an inattentive note in Bertie's voice.

Marston had come in front of her, and was stroking his beard in search of a subject of conversation and leaning forward upon his toes. Kitty took care not to turn her head that moment. Then . . .

"Well, Kitty," came the familiar voice, "I came here rather in hope of meeting you." Marston gave a faint gurgle in his throat and addressed his remark to Mrs. Gore, Kitty's neighbour.

"But I've never dined here before in my life," said Kitty, slyly.

"Did you come here by yourself?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then I shall take you home."

Kitty looked towards the piano. It was annoying, it was ridiculous. But her heart had got into a way of beating violently when Bertie spoke to her. She saw in a flash Mr. Dick Wentworth's face caught by the light of the candles . . . the pink shades; and she made a desperate attempt to look at it all as a picture, and think what colours she should use to put it down on canvas. Then the comic song began, and there was no more talk for the moment.

Vanlennert laughed more heartily and naturally than anyone else, for the song—it was one of the earliest of the costermonger series—was new to him.

"They always go in for that sort of thing now at houses, don't they?" he said.

"I don't know much about houses," said Kitty. Then for the first time she looked full at her companion. Presently—

"Does it still seem so queer to you being back in England?" she said. She spoke low, for somebody had begun to sing "Cock Robin."

Herbert started slightly. "By Jove," he said, "how did you know what I was thinking of?"

"By the way you looked, as you do sometimes when you are telling me about your book. It must be very . . ." the right word would not come. "I heard what you were saying at dinner about the people singing in the market-place . . ."

"Well, I'd told you about that before, hadn't I?"

"Yes; but those songs you read to me. I wanted to ask, did you translate them?"

"Oh, no! My friend Rood made those translations; I told you something about him. I'll tell you more next time I come."

"When will that be?"

"Oh, when you like. I'll tell you what made me think of Afghanistan just now," Herbert went on, in a low tone, without waiting for Kitty's answer. "It was that air he's singing. We got it out just when we were on a sort of exploring expedition up the Kunar—I told you I'd been there. We were supposed to be surveying only. But we were on the borders of Bajaur, and the chaps from Dir might attack us. We ought to have been more on the look-out. We'd been singing that song—I and another Englishman—he died—one night in tent, and then after we'd put out the lights . . ."

"Well, go on."

"We'd no idea, I must tell you, that the enemy were anywhere within sight. It's pretty high up there and it was winter—I should like you to have seen the stars, you've no idea—nobody in England can have any idea—what they're like. There were some low dark hills in front of us. It's a sort of deodar, really, I believe, that grows on them, but not at all a big tree there—and on the hills behind there was a good lot of snow . . ."

"Oh!" It was said almost like a stifled cry. But Herbert went on without paying attention.

"I was just looking out of my tent before getting into bed when all of a sudden . . . Why, what's the matter?"

"Oh, Bertie I saw it!"

Kitty spoke in a strange voice. She had forgotten everybody else in the room but themselves. At the sight of her pale face and her "Oh, Bertie!" some people stared and some smiled, for the song had come to an end: was this a declaration which was going on in such a conspicuous place?

"Saw what?"

"The fires!"

"You saw them. What do you mean? This is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of."

More and more people had been drawn into being participators in this scene. Vanlennert looked up and perceived it. "Miss Maynard's got the gift of second-sight," he said to Mrs. Wentworth.

"No? Tell us how. Have you really?" said several voices.

"I can quite imagine it," said Mrs. Gore, "with such an artistic temperament as I am sure she has."

But at this point Herbert wished he had not spoken. And everybody felt an awkwardness in pursuing the question, Kitty had turned so white.

It was Marston who relieved the awkward tension. "Second-sight ought to be as familiar a thing to you, Mr. Vanlennert, as—as second editions are to my friend Bloxam," he said. Thus the subject drifted away into the abstract and general.

"Why didn't you *tell* me that that chap who sat next you—Vanlennert—was a relation of Miss Maynard's?" said Lionel Wentworth crossly to his mother.

"I didn't know that he was."

"I shouldn't say that he is," said Miss Wentworth—all sisters are not sympathetic—"though perhaps he's going to be."

"Oh, yes, he is," said Lionel. "He went away with her in a cab."

"I wonder what the story of the second-sight really was," said Mrs. Wentworth.

"Oh, obviously that she had seen a vision of him when he was out in Afghanistan," said her daughter. "One didn't like to press for particulars, she seemed so distressed. . . . And it *was* giving herself away rather, if you come to think of it."

Mrs. Wentworth only looked deprecatingly at Lionel, who walked out of the room.

And if outsiders saw the matter in that light, Herbert Vanlennert may surely be excused for doing the same.

"By Jove, I've been a fool!" was his first selfish thought. How much oftener he had been to see Kitty than he realised! "Marriage would be the devil—that is, if I want to go back there again." Then his mind returned to Kitty's vision and to the tremble in Kitty's voice as she replied to more questions in the cab. It was infinitely touching, he thought. "All that long time ago, too. By Jingo, she must have been . . ." He didn't finish his sentence even to himself. "She's really beautiful, too—and as nice as they make 'em. Oh! there's no doubt anybody would jump at the idea . . . If one was settled in England and all that . . . The fact is I've got out of the *way* of thinking of marrying and that sort of thing."

Kitty was the person who earliest forgot the incident in the Wentworths' drawing room. It was one of those awful spectres

of the *past* (for a moment she had almost felt again the touch of Victor's fingers on her breastbone) which from time to time arose to terrify her. But her will had been so constantly evoked to exorcise these ghosts, that they never troubled her now for long. Strange to say, she did not once think of the interpretation which everyone else had put upon her distress.

She could the less understand why three whole weeks passed without her again seeing Bertie. Just as his book was coming out, too. That did seem unfriendly.

Kitty had in reality helped Herbert not a little with his proofs; for though not an adept yet at proof-correcting, she was in constant practice, and he had been out of it for years. She even suggested a change of style now and again; for though her education was scanty, Kitty had far more natural aptitude for letters than the writer of *Four Years in Afghanistan*. To give this help she had ungrudgingly, unreflectingly, sacrificed her evening black and white classes. Now quite suddenly she realised how all the eagerness for painting which had been the motive force of her life had deserted her. For what reason?

She would not answer openly even to herself. What was to become of her if this artistic passion, which she thought was the sheet-anchor of her existence, proved to have been buried in such light soil that a single tug displaced it?

"Oh, what will become of me!" she moaned to herself in bed. How hateful it was to be a woman and be at the mercy of—of what?—of—ah! there was no denying it!—a *man*, some man or other. Was the whole sex condemned to that? Such were her thoughts, though only half articulate.

Desperately she tried to seize upon that other, that free, independent, and artistic life which she thought she had made her own, or would one day make. It was all slipping, slipping away. And in its place a thousand desires and longings, terrible and inarticulate as the voice of an immense crowd, and tumultuous as the sea when it blindly follows the new moon.

"Oh, what will become of me!" Horror, shame, misery, everything seemed possible to one of a sex which was after all so desperately weak.

CHAPTER LIV.

"By Gad," said the late under-secretary for India, putting down Vanlennert's *Four Years in Afghanistan*, "that chap knows his business. And I used to think him a fool."

The speaker, this late under-secretary for India, was Percy Glenbyre. Percy was more tolerant than of old in his judgments upon other people. It was not that he had changed in any appreciable degree the high estimate which he had formed of his own abilities. But circumstances had not been altogether kind to him. Lord Glowrie had had a stroke; and no heir-expectant was ever more eager to succeed to a peerage than Percy was in dread of seeing the close of his career in the House of Commons. Worse than this, Glenbyre's mistress, a chorus girl at the Gaiety, had two years ago chosen an inauspicious moment to try and black-mail him, and to force a scandal before the British public in one of its most virtuous moods: she had produced a hitherto-unknown husband, who instituted proceedings for divorce. Of course the whole thing was collusion; but the moment was a fatal one. The scandal, such as it was, had seriously lowered Glenbyre's position in the House among his own party, so that his claims to a place in the next Radical Cabinet might be passed over. It was all the worse for Percy that he was not really a vicious man. He entertained a chorus girl, because, though a Radical, he was imbued with the traditions of Whig statesmanship. And for this same reason it was gall and wormwood to him to think that a leather-merchant, an ex-Methodist preacher, whose "h's" were not absolutely *sans reproche*, and who could not have construed a line of Virgil or a word of Greek, might likely enough, when Gladstone again came into power, be preferred before the Balliol scholar and society wit. To set against these misfortunes, Percy had lately married a rich, handsome, and clever American, who energetically supported all his ambitious plans.

Vanlennert was coming to dine with the Glenbyres that night. It was highly advisable for anyone who made Indian affairs his specialty to be primed not only in the book on Afghanistan but in whatever could be gathered orally from its author. The latter process (Percy had intended) was to allow

him to dispense with the former. Now, as he saw it was time to dress, he was surprised and pleased with himself that he had got so absorbed in what he read that he had succeeded, in his rapid way, in assimilating all the most important facts in *Four Years in Afghanistan*: he was pleased with himself and was cordially disposed towards the writer of the book.

It was January: there was supposed to be nobody in town. This was an excuse for making the party only a little committee of six. Lady Nellie Crowe, a married cousin of Percy's, and her husband, who were passing through town, and Miss Wilkinson, a compatriot of Mrs. Glenbyre's who, as she told Bertie, was "stopping" that night at the Glenbyres', made the other guests. The Crows left early; Mrs. Glenbyre and Miss Wilkinson went to bed; and Percy and his guest went into the smoking-room to finish the evening.

"How oddly one changes!" Herbert said to himself. "I used to hate this chap like poison. . . . If one could only go back to be what one was in those days, fool though I was," said another answering voice. But outwardly the returned traveller was only choosing a cigar and saying, "A small peg, thanks." What would have been still harder to guess was that Percy's thoughts were in a strain not very different; for Sylvia Tennant had represented the only element of romance his life had ever known.

"Do you see anything of the Tennants now?" Herbert said, in an absolutely indifferent voice.

"My cousins I see plenty of. They're always up for the season. Frank Forster's sold out. Of course, you know that Lady . . ."

"Lady Panton died. Oh, yes!" Herbert said, dropping his voice.

"Ah, yes! That was five years ago. I meant that Lady Tennant died last year—last January."

"Dear me! no, I didn't know. I'm very sorry." But there was a great difference in the tone in which this was said. Glenbyre's heart warmed somewhat towards his guest for these tokens of fidelity. "Crawfurd's not married yet," he went on. "But he's bound to now his father's been made a peer. He got in rather a row some years ago; but, of course, all that's blown over long since."

"Did he? What sort of a row?"

"About a woman. Probably nothing a reality; only that some screaming women got hold of it; that's what always

happens now-a-days. . . . Did you know the Churtons—the painter, you know?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Well, it was with a niece of his. Those Churton girls were a bad lot—if the truth must be told. One of them went off with Tennant. Of course, he was a fool to do a thing like that, which was sure to get known. I should have thought he was too sensible a chap to take a girl right away and make a scandal.”

“But didn’t he marry her?” Herbert said, rather severely.

“Oh, no,” Percy answered, standing with his back to the fire and his eye-glass in his eye. “The remedy would be worse than the disease—for both probably.”

“Well—of course one doesn’t know the rights and wrongs of the matter. But—I always disliked Tennant, I must say.”

“Oh, did you? He’s not a bad fellow by any means,” said Glenbyre, airily. “At any rate, I’ll bet a Churton girl would be worse. . . . It was a curious and rather ridiculous story as I heard it,” Percy went on after a moment’s pause: “Tennant was actually romantic enough to fight a duel about this girl. I never could have imagined him doing such a *banal* thing; and he got stuck near the heart, so that he’s not very strong now. He used to be as strong as Hercules.”

From that point the talk drifted away to other matters.

“Well,” said Bertie’s host before they parted, “I see your point is that we ought to push on to the Hindu Kush. But I’m not convinced that you’re right.”

“No; I never said that *we* ought to push on there. I said we must contrive some means of closing the passes against the Russians.”

“I thought what you people were making a row about was Gilgit.”

“Yes; that is true enough. That’s what my friend Rood wrote about in his *Fortnightly* article. But there’s Chitrâl to look after as well.”

“The Russians could never bring an army over the Pamirs.”

“An army—I didn’t say an army. They could bring troops over enough to frighten the people on the other side of the passes and make them . . .”

“They’re impassable, practically.”

“Not the Dorah Pass. I’ve been to the top of it.”

“I’m not a bit of a Russophobic myself. I was in the Russian Embassy once, you know.”

"Oh, Russophobia has nothing to do with it. Lots of people out there have got it, I know. I haven't either. But that does not affect this particular point. The subordinate officers push on, on their own account. Nobody can prevent that. People don't realise what an immense way off the central authority is."

"Well, well, I'm open to conviction. You must come and talk the matter over again some other day. I strongly suspect your book will produce a debate next session, sooner or later."

Herbert Vanlennert congratulated himself as he went away that he had done something towards the spread of convictions which were essential to the safety of the British Empire in the East. But if he could have interpreted Percy Glenbyre's words properly, they would only have signified, "I want before any debate comes on to be posted up in all the arguments I am likely to have to meet, and I see that I am as likely to get them from you as from anyone."

Every day during the last three weeks Herbert had said to himself, "I must go and see Kitty." Then something connected with his book evoked an inward voice which said, "You'd better not; wait a bit, at any rate." The more the inner voice warned him, the more his thoughts turned on the next visit, and on the memory of all the past ones during the three months that he had been in London.

It was a nuisance, he declared to himself. He had become of late quite a different person from what he had been three months ago when he had come back like a stranger to his native land.

("By Jove, how she looked when I told her she was almost the first person in London I had come to see when I got back!")

Now he was a lion. All sorts of old friends were reclaiming acquaintance with him; all sorts of schemes were being mooted for his future. Sir Hardinge More was in London again; his friendship for Bertie was personal, but also a pious tribute to his wife's memory. He was busy making interest for his young friend. Egypt was talked of as affording him a chance of a new career, better than any he could have looked for in Afghanistan.

("She's so awfully sensible now, so improved in every way. And then she's so friendless. That's just how I felt myself at first; you feel out of it, at first, coming back to England after so many years.")

They had seemed matters of course, those early visits, as from one friend to another. But now they seemed . . . Somehow the contrast between that tiny room of Kitty's where he had drunk so much afternoon tea and those large drawing-rooms in which he found himself now night after night gave, in despite of Herbert's better self, a touch of unreality to the former. So that now—well, he felt he could not go back to that little room on quite the same footing.

He thought of how Kitty had turned pale in Mrs. Wentworth's drawing-room and his heart beat. But here the voice urging delay—at least, delay was able to make itself heard. "It isn't always fair to a girl taking that friendly lay." Of course, girls like Miss Wilkinson were not in it for looks compared to Kitty Maynard. No single one of them was, despite exquisite gowns and many diamonds; but in the mass, they had a certain brilliancy. "Yet, how jolly and natural and lively she was that evening! I wonder why she seems sometimes so melancholy and almost morose. She ought to go out more, poor child! It's awfully hard luck on her. She used to have a lot of friends. Why doesn't she go to the Ayntrees as she used to do?"

Yes; by Jove. It was no pleasure to him that things had changed so in these three months. He did not like to say how attractive those friendly visits to Kitty, with his proofs, seemed in the retrospect.

Agreeably with his latest reflections, when, on one occasion, Herbert Vanlennert met Mrs. Ayntree in society, he spoke to her of her old *protégée*.

"Ah, poor Kitty!" the lady sighed.

"Poor! Well, she's not particularly rich, certainly. But we're so many of us like that."

Mrs. Ayntree gave her neighbour one darting glance. "I should so *like* to get her to come and see me," she said, in a sentimental voice.

"I don't suppose you'd have any particular difficulty," Herbert said, with just a point of irony.

"Then you've seen something of her. I'm so glad."

Herbert laughed. "So am I. I think she's charming."

"Oh! most charming and most lovely. If I can get Kitty to come, I shall count on you too. . . . How strange," she went on, still in her sentimental voice, when Herbert had accepted the invitation, "that you should be seeing a great deal of her, just as in old days!" And Mrs. Ayntree sighed again.

CHAPTER LV.

BEFORE Mrs. Ayntree's evening came off Herbert again encountered Kitty one afternoon at the Wentworths'. How beastly it was to see the way that young Wentworth stuck to her! Vanlennert scarcely supposed that life contained for him so strong a feeling of annoyance as he felt that afternoon. Had she or had she not given him—Herbert—a look of reproach? He debated the point with himself afterwards.

As he set himself down merely to lively and indifferent chat, she had done the same. Kitty Maynard was, indeed, quite feeling her way in society and could say really good things. Such had been Herbert's inward comment; and Mrs. Ayntree's melancholy tone seemed ridiculously out of place. For all that, it or something else affected Herbert's spirits. Confound it! meeting Kitty Maynard now was not the same as meeting her in the early autumn. He cursed himself: he cursed the warning voice; and found in the end the only satisfactory thing was that he was committed to go to the Ayntrees' three days hence, and that Mrs. Ayntree (for all he knew) didn't know the Wentworths.

He came in the best spirits. He had been dining with Sir Hardinge, and at Sir Hardinge's he had met Sir Everard Barclay, who was the man to know if you ever thought of making a career in Egypt. Herbert was used to being lionized now, but the process was by no means unpleasant in itself. He was not more, but rather less vain than most men; but behind the gratification of personal vanity there lay for him the possibility of making a new and useful career, not, in the future, as the servant of a barbarous prince, but as the servant—to all intents, at any rate—of the British crown. The way Sir Everard had spoken to him was certainly gratifying. So, though it was inevitable that he should come rather late to the Ayntrees', he came in the best spirits. He had been doing his duty, he could give the reins to pleasure and let conscience take care of itself.

His eyes wandered eagerly from side to side. The picture he had drawn was of Kitty flushing up to meet him and her eyes kindling. Confound it! There she was huddled into a

corner with that damned conceited ass, Lionel Wentworth, standing in front of her. In the first place, why had she stuck herself into such a corner that not half a dozen people in the room could see her, and it was almost impossible to get at her? That curious vein of shrinking and self-effacement which was Kitty's from time to time always annoyed Herbert. Anything like self-advertisement was hateful to him. But there was no sense when you were as pretty as they make 'em—beautiful, in fact, so that you saw people's eyes following her about when she moved—could talk, too, well enough if you chose—to go about like a hermit crab, always ready to hide yourself in your shell.

Herbert Vanlennert thought more of this than of the fact that Lionel Wentworth had penetrated within the hermit crab's retreat. Kitty appeared so listless and timid that it was impossible to entertain the idea of flirtation in her case. The whole of the picture which he had drawn of her flushing welcome fell to the ground as he took her limp hand, which was yet—as he thought a moment after—curiously hot. In his bad temper Herbert dropped the hand almost as soon as he had taken it.

"I couldn't make out where you had got to," was all he said. Kitty did at all events flush now. He hadn't even called her Kitty; then he turned to speak to another lady he knew. Then he wished he could kick himself for being so rude. He had seen the pale-faced, long-chinned Lionel Wentworth raise the heavy eyelids which covered his really fine eyes. He was leisurely twisting the guard of his *pince-nez*. Herbert knew that Wentworth was looking at him with anything but inward admiration—young graduate Oxford is proof against any form of hero-worship. He supposed he was trying to say nasty things about him to Kitty. The thing that most hurt Vanlennert was the perfect confidence he felt that Kitty was too loyal to her old friend for the insinuations to have the slightest effect upon her. "Her old friend." That was how Herbert always chose to put the matter to himself. But even that sensible attitude of his conscience irritated him to-night.

Bad temper, however, never lasted long with Vanlennert. He met an Anglo-Indian lady whom he had known in Bombay. Here, too, was her brother-in-law who had entered Kabul with Roberts in '80. They soon got upon subjects which interested Herbert and on which he could talk. A little circle seemed to

form itself round him and Sir Henry Barnard. Then Mrs. Ayntree bustled up and introduced him to one of her most important guests, Lady Nutcombe, the wife of the British minister at Teheran, whom he took into the refreshment-room. Lord Nutcombe came in just to take his wife away, and the latter introduced Herbert to her husband. "Evidently," the latter said to himself, "the Ayntrees have been getting on socially of late."

"She used to be such a Radical." Then he thought of her "Poor Kitty." "Is it, after all, that she's rather ashamed of her old friend because Kitty wears such plain frocks?" he meditated, as he ate a solitary sandwich before the table. "I should *never* have thought she was snobbish in that sort of way."

No; that could not be the explanation. Herbert turned round to find that most of the guests had gone and that Mrs. Ayntree was seated beside Kitty pressing things upon her. Lionel Wentworth was for the moment talking to another guest; but Herbert thought that he was still lingering about with a purpose.

"What a wonderful book that is of yours, Mr. Vanlennert!" said Mrs. Ayntree; "I've not had time to speak to you about it yet. Have you read it?" she said to Kitty.

"Oh, yes."

"Oh, Kitty helped me to write it," said Herbert, in all his former elder-brother manner.

"No, did you?" "You know I didn't," said the two women at the same instant. But Mrs. Ayntree looked all benevolence and made a little movement to invite Herbert to sit down beside them. "Well, everybody's talking about it," she said.

Herbert made the reply which had almost become stereotyped with him. "I don't care about everybody, so long as the official people do."

From that point he drifted away to speak of the dinner which he had had a few days previous with the late under-secretary for India.

"It's curious," Herbert said, "I used to know him in old days. His name's Percy Glenbyre. . . . He was a friend of the Tennants you know," he added, turning to Mrs. Ayntree. Even now he felt a thrill in pronouncing that name. It was a pleasure to speak of any of them now, though there had been a time when he thought he hated them all, except Silvia.

Mrs. Ayntree on her side could not prevent herself from

launching one scared glance at the girl beside her. But Vanlennert was lost in his own thoughts.

"His wife's a rich American, I understand," he went on, rousing himself. "A bright clever sort of woman I should fancy, who will push him on. . . . Altogether he's a good deal improved, I thought."

"I think he's horrid!" Kitty exclaimed suddenly, panting. A speech of Percy's about herself after—IT—had come round to her through the kindness of Ionë Churton; and there were still moments when her nerves got beyond her own control.

"Oh, do you know him? Why, what's the matter with him?" Herbert said.

"Nothing in particular, everything in general," answered Kitty more lightly.

"I don't know much of him; but he's not the sort of young man I like," said Mrs. Ayntree, coming to the rescue.

"He's a Radical, at any rate."

"That isn't everything. And beside, he's not a Radical in everything—not with the best sort of Radicals I mean. He has horrid views about women."

And without perceiving it they drifted into the so-called Woman Question. For that had arisen ominously above the horizon since Herbert left England for India. It was ill-advised of Mrs. Ayntree; but she never could be kept out of an argument. Kitty said little. But once when Herbert looked round at her her flushed face and angry eyes showed how keenly she felt on the subject.

"How stunning she looks!" was Herbert's first thought. But that did not allay the slight irritation he had felt with Kitty all that evening. It was still upon him, when he put on his coat and saw young Wentworth also hovering in the hall. Of course no one could take Kitty home but himself. He took possession of her without asking her leave.

"Mrs. Ayntree's just what she always was," he said, with a contemptuous laugh, as they were seated side by side in the hansom. "She's always taking up some ridiculous notion or other and trying to persuade herself she thoroughly believes it."

"But it's not at all ridiculous what she was saying just now," replied his companion, again beginning to breathe hard. Bertie on his side had irritated her that evening.

"Oh, yes, it is in reality."

"It isn't; I don't think so."

"I couldn't argue about it with you."

"That's what people always say. Then I've a right to think as I like till you do."

"Why, you're getting a regular Violet Fisher type. That comes of having to do with that rotten paper *Womankind* or whatever you call it. Don't go in for that sort of thing and get it into your little head that all men are either fools or blackguards. You're much too pretty to take up with those notions, Kitty."

This jarred inexpressibly; Kitty could have cried in her vexation. "You always want to make people do and think just what you think right," she said, angrily.

Herbert laughed joyfully. "Well, doesn't everybody?"

"No; they're not so prejudiced as you are. I wish you hadn't come back . . ."

"Wish I hadn't come back? Well, that is friendly!"

"That wasn't what I was going to say," Kitty said, clenching her little hand.

"What, then?"

"That you hadn't . . . come back . . . so . . . prejudiced . . . against . . . women." Kitty felt a lump rising in her throat.

"I'm not, bless you. Dislike women—I?"

"You think we're all silly and not fit . . ."

"My dear Kitty! what's the matter with you?" Now he had "drawn" Kitty, all Herbert's annoyance vanished. ("What a temper she has! It suits her no end. I expect she's overworked. What a shame!") This was the tenor of his thought.) "I say," he went on, drawing closer to his companion, "we're not going to quarrel, you and I. Why, you're about the oldest friend I've got in London." His voice had quite changed. Mentally, Herbert saw young Wentworth still lingering in the hall in Wimpole Street. And as he spoke he took hold of Kitty's little gloved hand—it was still clenched—lying so temptingly near him.

She gave a start. She was not flushed now. Such a rush of blood had gone to Kitty's heart that it deprived her of all power of speech. Ah! That blind, tumultuous tide, dumbly moaning, was it not beginning to find an articulate voice? Yet what terror might be hidden in its cry! The thought of love she had resolutely put from her for years; it had seemed something hateful even to think of. Now it all came surging back.

The visible sign of all this was the trembling of Kitty's little hand. But that alone transformed Herbert, and it was another man who spoke now.

"You work too hard," he said, gently. "You want someone to look after you."

"I . . . don't," she answered, in a muffled voice. "It . . . isn't that." She did not herself know what she was going to say.

"It's not what?" But he did not wait for an answer. They were passing along a dimly-lighted street now. "Dear Kitty," he said, "I think it is that."

She made an effort to withdraw her hand; but he held it tighter and drew her towards him. Now her heart seemed to stop beating utterly; then came—what she longed for and dreaded in equal measure—the touch of his lips upon her cheek. A thousand terrible memories arose.

"Oh, don't!" she cried, as if she had been struck. And tears came into her throat and checked her speech.

Through Herbert's mind there flashed at the same moment the memory of the kiss he had given Sylvia Tennant. This was not the same thing; but, alas! he had given so many since. "It was bound to come to this," he said to himself. It would be intolerable to think of anyone else taking possession of her—that young Wentworth, for instance. But he knew at the bottom of his heart she was still only a sweet and beautiful child to him.

Here with a jerk the cab reached its destination, and the enchanted journey had come to an end.

"I shall come and see you to-morrow," Herbert said.

"No, *please*." Kitty's look met his for the first time.

"What a *beast* I am!" Herbert said to himself as he drove away, realising that he had begun to question whether he had quite committed himself or no. "She's stunning. By Jove, it's what anybody might give their eyes for." He never questioned that Kitty was won.

When Kitty went into her room she was afraid to look round her. The inanimate things therein had all become alive; yet they kept the cold, indifferent heart of things inanimate. And that heart of theirs reflected the feeling of all the world in which she lived. She had been contented with that life, with the friendship of a Mary Beeston, the passing attentions of a Mrs. Wentworth; in her new cynical theory of life this was as much affection as she expected in the world. With more

and more resolution she had determined to hope only for the gain of a better and older friend in Herbert Vanlennert. He could by no possibility be more.

But now? It was no longer possible to cheat herself. Now it was explained why, after each meeting with Herbert, she had tossed feverishly on her bed and lain awake long into the night. Every look of his and every word enveloped her as with a flame. Yet she could not conceive why she had become of a sudden so devoted to a fellow-being. It was no more than the immense rebound of nature, which had been crushed in her four years ago, so that for a while she had conceived a horror of all the other sex, and after that had entertained thought of it only on the ground of pure indifference. Bertie, who belonged to the Saturnian era of her life, had always been excepted, and now . . .

Oh, if it were possible! For a moment she allowed her fears to vanish. That cheek that she saw before her in the glass—he had kissed it. Ah! There had been a time when she had thought only of the man, the lover, bowing down and worshipping *her*. Oh, if he would—if he really meant . . . She sank upon her knees. “Oh, God! I’ve been punished so much. I do love him so. Make him really care for me. It seems impossible.”

Herbert came, in spite of prohibitions, the next afternoon. A curious embarrassment sat upon Kitty. She had schooled herself to expect, almost to hope that the old friendly relations might still be maintained between the two. But her eyes were heavy, and she looked wan and sad. Herbert felt that he should never forgive himself that minute’s hesitation on his drive home. He had got rid of all doubts now; what could one wish for better than such a dear girl as Kitty? But love is not incompatible with an instinct for tasting one’s power. As it was going to be all right . . .

Thus it was that when Kitty, after shaking hands, began to get the tea ready, trembling a little under the eye of her guest, and presently gave Herbert a cup in just the old way, he broke his silence by bursting out laughing. “Well, you are queer!” he said.

Kitty flushed and shrank back almost as if from a blow.

“Why didn’t you want me to come and see you to-day?” Herbert went on in a changed voice, taking hold of Kitty’s hand. In that little room one person could hardly get out of reach

of another. But she drew back her hand and fell a-trembling.

"You're not angry with me?" he said.

Kitty thought he was speaking of the scene in the cab. "Oh, I *wish* you hadn't done it!" she cried in a distressed voice, and instinctively her hand went to her throat.

What could it mean? Was she going to tell him she preferred someone else? The thought increased the ardour of Vanlennert's love twentyfold.

"Last night? I couldn't help myself. . . . I did it because I . . . I love you, Kitty."

"You? Oh, *don't!*"

"Don't? I can't help myself."

"Oh—h! I wanted a friend so much."

"I am your friend. Why shouldn't I be your husband as well—some day?"

"My husband!" Kitty looked almost scared.

"What a child you are!" Herbert took Kitty into his arms as he said this. She gave an immense sigh. It was all right: there was nobody else! "Why do you look frightened? Why shouldn't you get married as much as anyone else?"

Kitty started at this last sentence. Ah, why? He did not know. But it was such a Paradise to be held in those arms even for a moment.

"But you don't want to marry me?" she said, speaking like one amazed.

"It looks as if I did. . . . Kitty! what do you take me for?" For when he kissed her she had shrunk away. "Are you afraid of me? Do you dislike me, or what?"

Kitty raised her eyes, "Dislike you!" The inexpressible blue eyes answered for her. "Oh, Bertie!"

"You're sure. I believe you do."

"Oh, I've loved you all my life!" she murmured, abandoning herself at last, "but . . ."

"You darling!"

"But I didn't think—you won't want to marry me," she went on; "you can't."

"I rather think I can," he said, laughing. It was time to give a lighter tone to the scene. Kitty's face was still vaguely distressing.

"Sit down, dear child," Herbert said, pulling her down upon the sofa and still keeping hold of both her hands. "I wish you didn't tremble like that. You make me feel a brute; some-

how I've frightened you. You don't think I am a sort of ogre, do you?"

Kitty leaned her head against his shoulder, "Oh, I do love you so!" she said, and burst into tears. She raised herself again. "I can't realise it," she said, with a cry of longing and of pain.

Herbert felt vaguely uneasy. "It's because she's got no mother, or anyone of that sort about her," he thought. "Dearest Kitty," he said, solemnly, "I swear I'll try and make you happy."

CHAPTER LVI.

"Is it really true," said Kitty Maynard to herself for the hundredth time, "that this has been the design of God for me all along? Oh, God—Jesus—how good you are! Mother—she would be . . . Oh, mother *must* be as glad as I am!"

And, after all, that was a secondary consideration. Of course, she should tell her mother—in a few days. But she was her own mistress. And Uncle Ned—well, him, too, she should tell presently. All that was unimportant. And her thoughts flew back to her hero—the hero of all these past years—a veritable hero, brave as he was good, *sans peur et sans reproche*. "Ah, Bertie, my darling, you are my first love!" But when she said that she stopped. There seemed no sort of equality between the two; Kitty could hardly bring herself to call this hero "darling," and was half afraid to kiss him even in her thoughts.

Herbert Vanlennert had been for telling everyone at once. But Kitty cried out against the notion, which seemed to her to rid their engagement of half its romance. Then he had given way. After all they had no one's leave to ask. No man cares to be shown off like a prize-winner at a cattle show. If Kitty had been living in a conventional way he would have to go out to dinners and be stared at, and expected always to be about the house. Now he came as often as ever he could, and Kitty was always ready for him; and on the not very frequent occasions when she did go at all into society, whether it were for dinner or tea, he went if possible to the same place and took her home. Mary Beeston fell ill just about this time and

went to her own people in Hertfordshire; so they had the chambers all to themselves.

"I hate the idea of your being here alone, when I'm not here," Herbert said.

Of course these visits could be only in the afternoons. And that left Bertie free to go out a great deal in the evenings. Sir Hardinge More, who was now governor of the Isle of Wight, had introduced him to a personage who had great and was likely soon to have still greater influence with the government of Egypt. Vanlennert made a favourable impression on this personage, who was, it was believed, wont to advise his Highness the Khedive in his choice of his officials and advisers.

"That's what Sir Hardinge thinks I ought to go in for. Of course, it's a more honourable career than being paid by the Amir, because one is practically a British official—though Egypt's like a kennel of a place compared to Afghanistan," and he heaved a sigh. "Afghanistan's absolutely out of the question, though," he added, hastily.

"Why?" said Kitty.

"I wouldn't take you out there."

"Why not? I should not mind; I should love to go."

"Oh, no! It would be out of the question. It's not a safe place for a woman."

Kitty inwardly shuddered a little. She remembered the description that Herbert had given in his book (she had read all the proofs of that book and knew it almost by heart) of a rising in Kabul; her imagination had made the scene more vivid than it was in the description. But she knew that she must make sacrifices. "I should not be afraid," she said, bracing up her courage and looking her hero in the face.

"How splendid you look to-day!" Herbert said, taking her in his arms.

"Oh, Bertie, you don't think I'm good for anything!" Kitty said, reproachfully.

At that moment a rap came at the outer door. Kitty sprang up. "It's only Uncle Ned," she said. "I know his rap," and she went to the door and opened it. One cheek, the one that Bertie had just kissed, was still blushing red: Herbert himself felt foolish before the searching eyes of his friend. He had been so busy he had not seen much of Bertram of late, "or I should have told him about this new development," he said to himself. "He looks older each time I see him," was another thought of Herbert's, with a vague feeling of shame

before the other's rounder shoulders and grizzling hairs and keen and patient eyes. He felt glad to go early that afternoon.

Kitty was left alone with her guardian. "Will you—will you have some more tea, Uncle Ned?" she said, speaking to him almost for the first time and trying to assume an indifferent voice. Her eyes and hands were busy with the cups. "Did you say . . ." she began, after a pause, looking up, and at once she looked down again.

"Well, tell me what it is," said Bertram.

Kitty blushed. Then she went to her guardian and threw her arms round his neck. "Yes," she said, looking up into Bertram's face, "I was going to tell you . . . I am . . . It seems too good to be true . . ."

The blood came knocking at Bertram's heart, but he had long ago grown inured to Kitty's embraces.

"You're engaged to Vanlennert?" Kitty nodded as it were with her eyes. "Well, that's . . ." he began, heartily.

"Why don't you finish?" Kitty said, pantingly.

"Oh! I'm as glad as anything. You couldn't have got hold of a nicer fellow or one I respect more."

"That's better," said Kitty, giving him a kiss. "He's far too good . . ." And here she caught a look in Bertram's eyes which made her turn pale. "What do you mean?" she said, angrily, catching her breath.

"Why, of course," said Bertram, nodding his head.

Kitty looked at him with wide eyes of terror.

"Of course, you must tell him about that—row."

"Oh, Uncle Ned, not that! You won't make me do that!" Kitty cried, with a scared face.

"You must, of course."

"Oh, I can't, I can't!" Bertram shook his head. "Oh, it's not fair!" she went on. "When everybody's been against me and kept me down, and I've never had any happiness in my life as other girls have, and now, and now . . . Oh, I love him so! more than I could say, ever." Kitty's voice sank to a whisper; she was clutching at the top of her dress by the throat; she tried to be calm. But she could not finish, she could not articulate.

Bertram's face had turned very grey with pity and with jealousy, too. "It's hard, of course, on you. But if he's a decent chap it won't make any difference in the end." There was a note of severity in his voice.

"It will make a difference," said Kitty, resentfully. "You've

no right to interfere, Uncle Ned. He didn't ask you if he might ask me."

Bertram was jingling his money absently. His head was bent forward. Kitty saw, without taking account of it, the ashen pallor of his face. He looked bent and old and full of care.

"Poor Kitty!" he said, staring into the tiny gas-fire. "I'm very, very sorry for you." There was a tremble in his voice.

Kitty was standing with her hands clasped before her; she was looking at Bertram with the eyes of one who awaits a sentence. Suddenly a temptation with veiled face came to her. She did not see what it was, and therefore could not know to what she had yielded.

"Perhaps I ought," she faltered.

"I'm sure you ought," Bertram answered, turning round. "It would be better for you—if you have the pluck. But, no! That's impossible. I'll tell the exact truth as—I know it." Bertram changed the end of his sentence. He did not like to recall the humiliating scene in which Kitty had years ago told him bit by bit all that terrible history.

"No. I can—I will tell him everything."

"You couldn't."

"I can—I will. He'll believe me." Alas! at this point temptation had unveiled its face.

"Ah! if he understood me and knew me as well as Uncle Ned does!" flashed the thought. "But he doesn't. He's so incomparably good. Everything is against me!"

It was like being two persons, Herbert Vanlennert acknowledged to himself. Inexpressibly happy were those afternoons and evenings which he spent in Kitty's tiny room. They were like the oases in life. And yet the simile hardly serves, because the rest of life could not be described as a desert. The moving among large crowds, the rush of London life and London society, the all-embracing ease and luxury, these things, too, made oases of another kind, compared to the hard nights and camping out under the stars, the frozen climbings, or sweltering days of Candahar. He and Kitty had a few common friends in society, and these now began to smile upon Miss Maynard and Mr. Vanlennert with something of the smile which people bestow upon proclaimed lovers. But the proclamation had never come; Kitty was not more, but less, willing now to go into the world, and the most part of Herbert's acquaintance knew nothing of Miss Maynard. Vaguely, her

lover felt that this was not right. But it was Kitty who used all her influence to preserve things as they were for a little time longer. Her unwillingness to go out secretly annoyed Vanlennert not a little. When he remonstrated she developed sudden fits of temper, which surprised him, but scarcely more than surprised him. They were so causeless it was impossible to take them seriously; and the next day she had always returned to such gentle moods that it was rather a temptation than otherwise to provoke them. Without them that tiny room of Kitty's might have become monotonously limited in area.

This went on for a month. Then Herbert insisted upon writing to tell his uncle and cousin. The result was, of course, an invitation for the two to go down to Gretton, and the day was fixed. Frank was expected back from Australia shortly; Gerald and Gerald's wife and child would be there to meet him. Herbert did not want to introduce the lonely Kitty into such a large family circle all at once. "She and Molly are sure to get on all right even without me," he said to himself. For it turned out at the last moment that he could only take Kitty down to Gretton, and must return almost immediately. Sir Hardinge More had been working for him, and he got an official intimation that Sir Everard Barclay would be sending for him next week—the day uncertain—to have a talk and make proposals to him for some place under the Egyptian Government.

Despite himself, Herbert's imagination would force him to go into details concerning the relations between Molly and Kitty when he was out of the way. The former was so absolutely reasonable, the latter—those fits of temper were very charming, Kitty looked so lovely in every mood; by Jove, it was splendid to think how lovely she was, and how, when she got to be better known, fellows would envy him; the only question was, whether all that would appeal to Molly as it did to him. There would not be for her, he divined, the submissive reconciliations that there were for Kitty's lover.

What Herbert was not prepared for was, that when he told Kitty how he would have to go back to London almost directly after he had taken her down to Gretton she should have turned so pale.

"Then I don't want to go yet," she said. "Why must we go yet?"

"Oh, yes; I've promised. It would look—they wouldn't like

our not going. I wish I could have stayed. But you see I must be ready to see Barclay. You'll get used to them directly."

"Oh, Bertie! I can't go. I don't want you to leave me."

"My dear child!"

"I wish you wouldn't always call me a child," Kitty said, in an aggrieved tone.

"I call you what you are," he said, laughing.

"It isn't fair," Kitty Maynard all but clenched her fist as she spoke. "I'm not a child. It's you who always make me like a child. If I am, I'm not fit to marry you."

"Ah, when you get to my age you'll wish someone would take you for a child." The good humour with which this was said was meant to be exasperating.

"You're not so very old." (It was absurd, thought Herbert, how seriously Kitty took some things; she was evidently in almost a passion.)

"I'm getting bald here, or soon shall be," and he felt the top of his head.

"Oh, I'm so unhappy!" said Kitty, suddenly, bursting into tears.

("Really this is too absurd. She must be getting hysterical. It's this cursed, stuffy little room that does it," Herbert said to himself, inwardly fuming, outwardly gay.)

"Because I'm getting bald! What a dear, sympathetic child—girl you must be!"

"Don't," said Kitty, with a sob. "You don't understand—you think . . . I've never . . . gone about . . . or seen anyone . . ."

"Well, if you haven't, I don't want you to have. . . . Oh, you think I wanted you to be more in society. My dear Kitty!"

"But I have."

"Have what? Gone out into society?"

"Yes; and . . . I used . . ."

Vanlennert thought he saw a light. "Yes, I've always wondered you didn't go out more—to the Churtons and all the people you used to know." ("I'm glad she didn't though, after all," he added, to himself, remembering suddenly Percy Glenbyre's pronouncement that the Churton girls were a bad lot.) Kitty had given a shudder when he said the name of the Churtons.

"I used to—I don't like them," she said.

"No; I don't, either, much."

"But that's not what I wanted to say. . . . I've always wanted to tell you." Kitty was pale and her teeth chattered as she spoke. "Mrs. Ayntree asked me to stay with her, and took me out to dinners and all sorts of things."

"Well; you look as if it had been a tremendous ordeal."

"It was, because . . ."

"You're such a hermit crab. Well, I think that's stupid; and besides, you're awfully admired when you do go out." Herbert put his arm round Kitty as he said this: he was ashamed of himself for being half inclined to quarrel a minute ago. But Kitty drew a little back.

"Oh, no!" she cried, in a sad voice. "It wasn't that—I liked it. You don't understand."

The light shone more distinctly. It brought a little pang of jealousy with it, there was no denying that. But Vanlennert's generosity came to the rescue. "Yes," he said, with a smile a shade forced, and looking a moment into Kitty's eyes, which were at once cast down. "I think I do. You mean . . . that I'm not the first."

"Oh," said Kitty with a groan, "I can't tell you! It wasn't my fault."

"Of course it wasn't."

"If you hadn't been away," she went on with a moan. "But I was . . ."

"Hard hit?" That seemed evident from Kitty's face. Yet she'd said she'd always loved him. That was the only annoying part, and that made his voice grave.

Kitty was white and trembling. She looked up at him with pleading, scrutinizing eyes. After all—

"Well, well," he said, taking her in his arms, "people are not obliged to confess everything. I don't suppose there was much harm done."

"It wasn't my fault, it wasn't my fault," she said, laying her head on his shoulder.

"Of course it wasn't. Don't get hysterical about it, after all that time."

"But you don't know yet."

"Well, you can tell me some other time, if you want to. So long as you are satisfied with the present state of things. . ."

"Oh, Bertie!" In truth, there could be no room for doubt upon that point.

"Sort of girl's infatuation, I suppose," he said to himself, and out loud, "When was it?"

"Oh, years ago!"

"When you really were a child?" He said it quite lightly and naturally to any common ear. But a deeper sense in Kitty detected something else in his tone, and she still clung to him timidly. "I suppose she got thrown over," Herbert said to himself, with a feeling of impotent exasperation against the perpetrator of this insult to Kitty and to himself. Nothing would have made him such an ass, Vanlennert declared to himself, as to be jealous of the man who for a brief moment had possessed Kitty's heart, and then thrown it away again. There could be no question whose it was now.

CHAPTER LVII.

"SHE is most beautiful," said Mrs. Orcher, in the Gretton drawing-room, the second evening after the arrival of Herbert and Kitty. "I do hope dear Bertie is going to have some happiness in his life at last."

"Oh, yes, I hope so now," said Molly. "But he will have to go away—to Egypt he expects."

The women were somewhat grouped together, though the men had come in from the dining-room. For the truth is, the latter were almost irresistibly, almost unconsciously, attracted to the neighbourhood of Miss Maynard. Kitty had never looked better than she did to-night. A something to which she gave no name had fallen off her, now that she had left London behind and come among an utterly new set of people. She was shy, but excited at the same time; her eyes glowed, and her cheeks were beautifully flushed. At its worst Kitty Maynard's face had a certain richness of colouring; now, at its best, it had the colour of a Venetian beauty of the great days. The shape of her face was not Venetian, but with a wider curve and longer oval; that which had been the promise of its childhood was now fulfilled. Herbert was exercising all his power of will to keep up a conversation with Mrs. Brown of Mallaby and Miss Brown; his cousin Frank—just come back from Australia—had secured a seat by Kitty's side.

"I shouldn't wish my worst enemy to go to such a dog-hole as Australia," he was saying.

"I see; then you mean you don't even wish us to go there," said Kitty.

"Oh, I don't know about *you*. Let me find out whether I've got to go back myself or not."

"I am afraid Bertie couldn't wait till you've found out that. He's going to look after a place on Monday next." And as she spoke Kitty shot a glance across to her lover, which he felt rather than saw.

"To look after a place, is he? What sort of a place—a valet's place or a butler's?"

"I think you're very impertinent, Mr. Vanlennert."

"I'm not Mr. Vanlennert, in the first place. Well, that's the way you put it. All right; tell me where the place is likely to be."

"I don't think I shall."

"Oh, I say, you are down on a chap. I've only just come back, you know, and I don't know my way about yet."

"Yes," Herbert was saying to Mrs. Brown, "it fills the whole air. It's a thing you can't realise till you've seen it. I remember so well being overtaken by a flight just outside Candahar. They're much rarer in Afghanistan than they are in India, I believe; and in a place like Candahar they do an enormous amount of damage. I had to put my head down and screw up my shoulders; and they came tumbling down into the buggy by hundreds. The worst was I had a little fox-terrier in the cart and he began eating them up, and they poisoned him."

"What a greedy little doggie!" said Miss Brown.

"Is it true, Miss Maynard," said Mr. Prestwith, "that it was your father who painted that wonderful picture of a man ploughing? I have an etching of it." Mr. Prestwith was Mr. Lyme's successor at Netley.

"Do you paint yourself? I expect you do, don't you?" said young Mr. Brown.

"Yes, a little."

"I don't believe you paint yourself," said Frank, looking her full in the face.

"Have you been to Netley yet, Miss Maynard?" said Mr. Orcher, approaching in his turn.

"No; we only came last night, and it was so snowy this morning. But Ber—Mr. Vanlennert is going to take me to church there to-morrow."

"I was going to say," said Mr. Prestwith, in his fatherly

way, "I hoped you'd do that, and come into tea afterwards at the Vicarage, if you will."

"What, Prestwith, are you trying to carry off my congregation, and bribing them to come to your church?" said Uncle George.

"It's only in the afternoon," said Kitty.

"I'm afraid you'll be turning the heads of my congregation," said Mr. Prestwith.

"No doubt about that," said Frank.

"Well, well," said Mr. Orcher, still harping on the idea of Netley, "there are compensations in life. Herbert has been fortunate to find that out."

"Thank you," said Kitty, demurely.

"Why did you say 'thank you'?" Frank said, in a low voice. "He never said he meant you."

"I think you're quite horrid. You're trying to frighten me when I'm here all alone."

"Oh, you don't look frightened; I'm almost as much of a stranger as you are."

Indeed, Kitty found a good deal of comfort in the presence of Frank Vanlennert. He, who had been absent eight years from England, was only one degree less a stranger than she was herself. Whereas all the others, the Orchers, the Browns of Mallaby, the Banburys, the Wheatleys, were to her as a family party who had met together to appraise and criticise the new introduction. With Frank, too, there came in a breath of colonial freedom which suited with the excitement which Kitty felt, and with the strange exaltation of her spirits.

Now Herbert was hearing from Mrs. Orcher about Charlie, and the account he sent of himself from Lisbon. Then the guests began to file away: the Orchers were the last to leave.

"I think," said Mrs. Orcher, kissing Kitty as she took leave, "you are one of the most beautiful girls I ever saw."

"Hear, hear!" cried Frank, who still kept near. "Only I go further than that."

"I am so glad, dear Bertie," Mrs. Orcher said to her favourite, as she squeezed his hand outside the door; and, looking in his eyes, she saw that they were moist.

The next morning, which was Sunday, Molly coming down from her mother's room (Mrs. Vanlennert kept her room a good deal now, and much of Molly's time had to be spent there) encountered Herbert at the foot of the stairs. She took his arm affectionately.

"I hardly seem to have had time to speak a word to you since you came," she said. "I do congratulate you, Bertie dear. Certainly Kitty is a most beautiful girl."

"Yes. There can't be any doubt about that," answered her cousin in a voice not completely content. "Everybody tells me that."

"Do you object to being told so?" asked Molly, smiling.

"No, only—well, she's more than *that*. I'm not such a fool as to want to marry a girl only because she's a pretty face."

"Oh, yes," replied Molly, heartily: "her face is much more than pretty. It's a most interesting face; very clever I should think. I'm longing to get to know more of her. Of course she can't be expected to open out very much in the first twenty-four hours." I'm so glad she's going to stay after you go back (Except for—added Molly's thought). "Of course you've known her for years and years, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Herbert.

"Why didn't you tell me about her before?"

"I knew her very well; but it's true I didn't think of *mar—* of asking her to marry me, somehow. . . . You don't think," he said, suddenly, "I'm too old to marry a—a girl like that?"

"Too old! Why, you're only thirty-two!"

"She's only twenty-two, and very young at that."

"For goodness' sake, don't get into the idea that you're old, Herbert. As it is, I think . . ."

"Well, what?"

"I hardly know what I was going to say."

"Oh, yes, you do: out with it."

"Well, I think it was—you know you are rather brusque sometimes. I suppose it is having to do with natives so long."

"Do you mean to say that I shall bully Kitty when we're married?"

"No, you goose. Of course you could not bully anyone. But I think somehow you—I think in a way she's just a little bit—I won't say afraid."

"Of me? What rot!"

"No; that's not the right word. I didn't mean to say afraid."

"Oh, no; absurd. How's aunt Marion?" said Herbert. He began to think there was something disloyal to Kitty in talking her over in this way. Molly flushed, a little hurt. But she, too, was glad to change the drift of their talk. There was something not quite right in the relations of Herbert and his

fiancée, so much her instinct had found out; but she could not, even to herself, give a name to this something.

"She's not very well this morning," she answered. "This frost coming again so late is bad for her, of course. She's not going to get up for church."

"Oh, *no*: I suppose not."

"She generally does." Molly's eyes filled with tears. "She does get weaker," she went on. "Frank's coming back has of course been an agitation for her. But, I'm most glad he should have come."

"Ah! You think . . ." Herbert began in a moved voice, and nodded his head. There was no need to finish the sentence. Probably he did not think that in the long run his aunt would be likely to get much comfort from Frank's return, and he suspected that at heart Molly must be of the same opinion.

Molly walked into the drawing-room to fetch her books, and Herbert mechanically followed her. The fire was blazing in the room, but one of the French windows was open. A frosty air came through, and the snow lay crisp and glittering in the sun. And through the window they could hear the voices of Frank and Kitty.

"That's a good one. You very nearly hit that time."

"Oh, my fingers will come off!"

Then followed two or three dull thuds of snowballs hitting against the trunk of a tree.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Kitty, joyfully.

"Confound it! It's freezing hard; you can't make the beastly stuff bind."

"You try to make such big ones."

The two in-door cousins walked to the window and looked out. Molly's brow contracted; it did not suit with the traditions of Gretton Rectory, snowballing on Sunday, just before church. The rector had even now gone into his study to collect his books and sermon. Moreover, the snowballing was going on just under Mrs. Vanlennert's window.

"Oh, I say, come in!" Herbert called impatiently from the window. Thence he saw that Frank had inserted a clay pipe into a crevice of a copper beech upon the lawn, and it was at this they were shying. Kitty turned round; her face at once became grave, and she threw down her snowball. This very promptitude of obedience annoyed Herbert somewhat; but not the less so did Frank's lingering to have one more shot at the clay pipe.

"You're getting into very bad ways, if you do what Bertie tells you in a minute already," Frank said to Kitty as they were crossing to church.

"Oh, if you've got to obey at all, you may as well do it at once, and do as you like the other times," she answered.

"Yes, there's something in that."

In the afternoon Herbert and his betrothed went alone to Netley Church. They went by the gravel-pits to the Stretton Road, and so across an angle of the park. To their right the sun was hanging, a huge red ball, behind the trees of the avenue, which held up black, distorted arms above their couch of snow. On the left were the Netley woods, under the shadow of the limestone rock; and presently the woods opened out, and the house was visible.

"Well, that's Netley," Herbert said.

"Oh!" answered Kitty, with a long-drawn intonation. "All this belonged to you? And you've lost it. How sad for you!" And she looked up sympathetically into the other's face.

"Well, I told you all about that."

"Yes; but I never thought about it before."

Herbert gave a short laugh. He had begun to divine that curious absorption of hers in things which interested her and deadness to things outside. Even his affairs, he knew, did not necessarily claim her attention.

"To-morrow morning we'll come and look at the house. The people are there, but . . . of course, they'll let us in. . . ." Then, after a pause, he went on, "One's always like that. Now I'm out of it, I'd give anything to get it back."

"Well, why should you not some day . . . come back like—like Warren Hastings? Didn't he buy back a place that had belonged to his family?"

"Did he?" said Herbert, rather absently.

"Oh, yes. It was Warren Hastings, I'm sure. 'And it was to Dalesford that he retired to die.' We had that essay once in some classes I used to go to with I—Ionë Churton. You'll get to be something very swell in Egypt."

"I sha'n't; I'm not cut out for that sort of thing."

"You are, dear," Kitty said, taking his arm. "You're just cut out for that sort of thing."

"Oh, if you want to say nice things, I'll say that there'll be an Angelica Kauffmann lost if you give up art to marry me."

Secretly, Kitty thought this by no means an extravagant

compliment. "Perhaps there is," she said, giving the slightest toss of her head. "You don't know and you don't care."

"Well, if you care, let's reconsider it." Their eyes met, and as it were, their glances kissed each other.

"What I was made for, at any rate," Herbert went on, "was to be a country gentleman, and nothing else. I see that now it's too late."

"Oh, Bertie! you can't mean you aren't glad you went out there?" (Had she not been thinking the night before, when Frank was telling her some of his adventures in the antipodes—and they lost nothing in the telling—that *her* Bertie had done more wonderful things than that?)

"I don't know. I'm no better than a sort of adventurer." (Herbert, on his side, was thinking of Frank.) "And now, you see, I am, so to say, turned out of work again. I seem to have gone along all my life beginning to do things. It's much better living among one's own people, filling a niche in the world—as Molly does, for instance. She's just my ideal of what a woman ought to be." (This was said without any intention.)

"Yes," said Kitty, without enthusiasm. For one thing, Herbert was walking too quickly for her. Her weak ankle always made her limp a little bit and progress slowly.

"It seems beastly now, I must say," Herbert went on, talking as he might have done to Molly. "If I had known that Edmund was going to sell the whole place, every stick and stone of it, I'd have done anything to stop him. People here now," he nodded his head backwards towards the hall, "whom the villagers have never heard of; and they've known our family for two hundred years. . . . Of course you don't understand that sort of thing," he said rather impatiently, when his companion made no reply; and once more he thought of Kitty and Frank snowballing in the morning.

"Oh, Bertie, please, if you wouldn't walk so fast."

"I beg your . . . Oh, I say, what a brute I am! Your ankle does hurt, I know." There was, indeed, a slight contraction of pain about Kitty's forehead.

"Scarcely at all. If I could sit down a moment anywhere; only one can't."

"Yes, we can, when we get to the avenue. There's a seat under that tree."

"Oh, Bertie, you don't know how much I love you!" was Kitty's irrelevant remark when they were seated for a moment.

"You darling! You're worth a thousand Netleys," he answered.

"You don't really think so," said Kitty, with sudden despondency.

"Kitty! What do you mean?"

"And I'm not. I'm so awfully selfish. I wasn't thinking a bit how much you must miss it all: only how much I love you."

"Well, I don't miss it as long as you do that."

"You will always love me, Herbert? And then I shall be good," and she looked up with appealing eyes.

"Of course I shall, you goose." He took hold of both her hands. "You are a lovely child! If we were not in such a conspicuous position . . ."

Kitty got up and somehow draped her womanhood about her.

"We must go in now," she said, rather coldly.

Shadows were beginning to spread through the little church as they entered. Behind the rood-screen the light shot upwards and hid itself in the groining of the roof: white-robed figures passed into this region of candle-light, and their faces were seen and lost between the glare and the shadow. In front of this veil of light the screen and the reading-desk rose black. Kitty's church-going (even in London: for during her first year in London an aunt had sacrificed herself to live with her; and, when this relationship had been severed, Kitty had tried to walk in the paths traced out for her by her mother) had been associated with whitewashed parallelograms, at one end of which, in the full blaze of gas, black figures rose and preached for quarter after quarter of an hour. This restored Gothic church, with its mouldings and groinings, filled her full of mystery. Then, for a moment, she turned her eyes to one unstained window at the side, and saw the ball of the sun just touching the horizon, and the weird, bare arms of the elm-trees above the grey ground. It was enchanting, awe-inspiring.

Her past life floated before her—all the fairest parts of it. She saw herself a child at Chiswick walking in the long grass of Ravenscourt Park; from thence came nearly all the rustic associations of her early childhood. The house at the end of the park had been her enchanted palace; the elms above her head—there were elm-trees there too—were immeasurably high, and what is more, they were charged with a mysterious vitality which no other trees had ever had since. For when quite little

Kitty had heard the expression witch-elm used, and the phrase had sunk deep into her mind. It meant that all elms might be—what in those days she hardly dared to put into words.

She started. The organ began and the choir set to work upon the psalms. (Both organ and choir were as fine as was commensurate with the size of the little church.) Wave upon wave of sound broke over her. Sometimes all her senses were submerged. Then again they arose. A legion of poetic fancies chased one another through her mind. She thought of Kubla Khan's Palace builded by sound, of the awful river rushing through the caves of ice; of the ancestral voices prophesying war. And then again of Macbeth and Banquo on the blasted heath—

“Were such things here as we do speak about?
Or have we eaten of the insane root
Which takes the reason prisoner?”

Now she caught the appealing voice of the tenor in the cry of faith, *Non nobis, Domine*—

“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us”—

and her religious life began to stir within her memory.

There had been one coloured window in the Chiswick church, and from the centre of this the figure of Jesus Christ looked down with mild and regal eyes upon her where she sat. An intense and passionate admiration for this being had been one of Kitty's earliest experiences. There had been a short blissful time when all the history of God's, or say Christ's, dealings with men had seemed natural and humane. The future life in heaven had been a certainty; the New Jerusalem had been as real and simple as the fairylands of her fairy-tales. But her mother's creed had taken a stricter form—or, what was permitted to a very little child had to be suppressed as Kitty grew older. Hardest blow of all, her mother took fright at her devotion to the image of Jesus. She was warned against loving what was mere glass and paint. The beautiful being was dethroned in a fashion; he was not quite Jesus, it seemed, though he still reigned in Kitty's heart. Finally, they removed to a more “faithful” preacher at North End Chapel, and Kitty lost her vision for ever.

During all the subsequent years that face, Kitty's first love and her first adoration, haunted her. During her year of humiliation at Norwich it had returned more vividly. She had had

to form a religion for herself, something vague and yet passionate, surcharged with mystic love, and yet reaching forward to some ideal which was artistic more than moral. She prayed for inspiration and felt it descending upon her, a keener sense of colour, an enjoyment of the higher pleasures of sense, of music when she heard any, above all, of the colours and shapes of nature; which reached beyond nature or this world. If she had been a German scholar she might have found her faith embodied in two passionate lines—

“Sicherlich es muss das Beste
Igendwo zu finden sein.”

And now might she not still have before her the life of an artist, steeped in church-music, remote, apart—yet feeling kindly unto all the earth?

“World without end.—A-a-men.”

The *Magnificat* was ended: the music ceased. How extraordinary! To what regions had she not been carried away?

“What worlds or what vast regions hold
The immortal mind that hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshy nook?”

She turned to look at Bertie. His figure sat up four-square, well-knit, though slight, with a serious, a capable face—to Molly, to Mrs. Orcher, even a romantic figure. He was evidently following the service decorously, yet not so closely that he could not spare a glance this side and that from time to time.

A great terror fell upon Kitty. This marriage was an awful thing—to anyone, even to the best of men.

When they went to have tea in the vicarage, Herbert had wanted to borrow the Prestwiths' pony carriage. “They wouldn't make the slightest bones about it, and you ought not to walk any more.” But Kitty resisted.

“Oh, yes, this *one* last walk.”

“Don't talk in that tragic way of one last walk. Why, to-morrow morning, if you like, we can send the carriage back and walk home. I don't start till 4.10.”

“Oh, yes. But that's in the daytime.”

Bertie laughed and squeezed her arm against his side. And

on their way home, as he was talking about a hundred things, Kitty was very silent, and she clung to him as if he were slipping, slipping away from her.

CHAPTER LVIII.

"Oh, what a wretch you are!" Kitty said, as Frank's halma man jumped from side to side right across the board.

"Ha, ha! Sold again." Frank waited for his opponent to play, and glanced out of the window. "Here comes the postman. You ought to give him an extra Christmas box."

"It's too late for Christmas boxes now."

Molly came into the room. She gave Kitty a letter. Kitty looked at the writing and her eyes softened; then she put it down beside her on the ottoman and went on with her move. Molly frowned. Kitty expected the frown; she was dying to read Bertie's letter, but a love of independence hindered her.

"I wish," thought Molly, "Frank hadn't turned up a week too soon."

It was the second day after Herbert's departure. Kitty had now been at Gretton six days. Everybody meant to be most kind; Uncle George not only meant to be, but was. With the two women, on the other hand, small influences, influences not deserving the name of jealousy, rather of clan feeling, began to make themselves felt. Now, not only did Frank always associate himself with Kitty's opinions and ways, but his own audacities drew down so much criticism that Miss Maynard found great secret comfort and a sort of protection in his presence at Gretton; she had got to look upon Frank's neighbourhood as so necessary to her security that she never asked herself what she thought of the man himself.

In his letter Bertie told Kitty how he had paid his first visit to Hertford Street to see if Sir Hardinge More had come up from the Isle of Wight, and how Sir Hardinge had insisted on his removing himself, bag and baggage, to Hertford Street likewise. "I haven't told him my great piece of news; but I shall to-morrow night," he wrote. "As soon as Miss More comes up they are sure to ask you to come up and stay with them. By Jove, they will sit up when they see you."

This compliment was very sweet to Kitty. And, after that,

her lover went on in a tenderer strain, "I've been thinking since I came back what a beast I was to tire you out that day we went over to Netley Church. I don't know how it is, I've lived so long only with men, that I'm disgustingly inconsiderate sometimes, I know. But it's only in little things, dear Kitty. I'm always thinking about you. . . ."

And there was more which was very sweet indeed, and yet not quite in the strain of a lover, after all. Perhaps Kitty may have felt this at the bottom of her heart. But she pressed the dear sheets against her cheek and kissed them many times.

"Oh, a painter's daughter," said Sir Hardinge. "Well, I'm sure, Herbert, I wish you every happiness." He felt that there was a certain want of emphasis in his congratulations, and he turned over in his mind what subject of special congratulation he could find. "Well," he went on, after a moment's pause, "I'm sure any man who gets hold of a simple, modest girl in these days for a wife may be considered a lucky fellow. I wouldn't wish any one to marry some of the girls who go about London now-a-days, if one-tenth part of what I hear about 'em's true. And I believe a good lot of it is. They paint themselves up to look like a lot of da—disgusting polls. It's a most astonishing thing to me. You see it among quite good people—the people who come down to Osborne. As for the set who—h'm!" He paused suddenly, not wishing to say anything which might savour of disloyalty.

"Yes," said Herbert, who was standing up by the fire smoking a cigarette, "I notice a lot of difference among the smart people, so far as I've seen anything of them, even in these five years. There'll be a big scandal or set of scandals, I expect, before long. Then, perhaps, there'll be a change again. But just now—I'll tell you a story I heard last night at the club. . . . Now," he said at the end of the story, which could hardly be committed to these pages, "do you suppose a thing like that could happen in the house of people like the Tredeshaws?"

Sir Hardinge's eyes were very round as he listened and his face a dusky red. At the end he nodded his head three times; finally he knocked the ash off his cigar and said, in a rather solemn, rather hushed voice—

"Well, I could tell you a worse story than that, which I know to be true, for I had it from Freddy Barnes." (This was Sir Frederick Barnes, G.C.B.) "He's very intimate with the

Prince-a-Wales, as you know, and the Hawkhursts are very much in that set."

Though the conversation had taken a sufficiently scandalous turn, neither of the two supposed that he was actuated by any love of the subject, and each was moved by a very genuine disgust for the state of society which these stories revealed.

Wherefore, when Herbert Vanlennert put his head upon his pillow that night he thought, with a point more of enthusiasm than usual, of Kitty's childlike simplicity, as well as of her beauty and her love; and he wished he had made his letter of yesterday morning—he was not one of the lovers who write every day—even more tender than he had done.

Kitty Maynard buried her face in her sofa-cushion and sobbed. Why was everyone against her? When she had come there so happy and meant to like everybody. Why did people insult her wherever she went? "Because she was alone in the world." Kitty had long ago made up her mind with cynical decision that her unprotected condition—along with the artistic sensitiveness which she felt within her, though she gave no name to it—marked her out for ill-usage at the hands of mankind. But whenever she was made to realise this, she hardened her heart and determined, at any rate, not to show what she suffered.

The latest insult had come in the shape of a proposal from Frank. "How dare you?" Kitty cried with flashing eyes, which unluckily had only the effect of making her more lovely and desirable. Frank seemed quite impenitent. "You'll never get on with Bertie: he's a most awful prig," he said, sulkily. (What was so disgusting was that Frank's voice was so like his cousin's.) "He's not, he's not! It's not true!" Kitty answered, stamping her foot. Then she had rushed up to her own room.

The rage passed, the cynical mood succeeded. Now her letter was brought to Kitty. It contained the expected, yet most wonderful news: Bertie had been offered a post by Sir Everard Barclay.

"So, dearest Kitty," he wrote, "I shall have to go out in a month's time, and that means—you can guess what." . . . Here, at any rate was one man who could and would protect her! That was Kitty's first thought. But the cynical depression of her spirit was too great to be uplifted even by this great piece of news. The nearer a certain unhopd-for miraculous event came, the more shadowy it seemed.

Molly had had a letter from Bertie likewise, and as Kitty lay—she had now dried her eyes: only a dull defiance of the world burnt in her heart—a tap came at her door and Molly entered.

“*Well*,” she began, and paused. “Is anything the matter?” she asked, suddenly.

“No; I’ve got rather a headache, that’s all.”

“Poor dear!” Molly kissed her. Kitty only submitted passively. “Then we won’t go to the Banburys’ to-night.”

“Oh, yes, I’d rather. It’s not much. I shall be all right directly.”

“Well, of course you’ve heard from Bertie? It’s dreadful to think of his leaving us all again so soon. I *wish* he would find something to do in England—if you could live near us. But I suppose there’s no use hoping for that now.” Molly took hold of both Kitty’s hands. “How cold your hands are! Your head’s really bad I expect. Lie down, dear; I’ll go and get some eau-de-Cologne.”

Kitty thought it best to let this excuse serve, and avoid talking. She had not been in the least ill since she came. Molly, as a nurse, appeared in a new character. At last, in a sudden compunction, Kitty took her hand and kissed it. Molly’s warm heart at once responded. Kisses were, of course, between these two, but the small change of daily intercourse. Yet this time each felt that they gave more genuine kisses than they had done hitherto.

“Is your head better now, dear one?”

“Yes, my head’s nothing; don’t go . . .”

“I must not make you talk . . . And this is such tremendous news. Bertie says . . . But of course he’s written the same thing to you.”

“Yes.”

What did that mean? A terrible conjecture flashed into Molly’s mind. She stood up and gazed down at her visitor.

“Kitty, what do you mean?”

“I don’t know what I mean,” said Kitty, gloomily. “I feel I shall never marry him.”

“Oh, Kitty! How can you say such a thing! Why not?”

“I don’t know why: I feel it.”

“You don’t want—you can’t mean that.”

In a moment Kitty had sprung to her feet. “Don’t want to? How dare you say so? . . . You’re against me too!” she added, as if speaking to herself.

“I’m not against you, Kitty,” said Molly, in a softened voice.

"Why don't you tell me what's the matter?" ("They can't have quarrelled—Herbert would not have written as he did.")

"There's nothing the matter," Kitty answered, in a depressed tone.

"Perhaps she's only hysterical," Molly thought to herself afterwards. "But she's *not* the wife for Bertie." This sentiment did not prevent Molly Vanlennert from looking suspiciously and severely at her brother Frank when he came down, ready to escort the two women to the Banburys'.

Not a trace of her former gloom could be seen in Kitty Maynard's countenance when she arrived for the little party. It was scarcely more than a family dinner, with the prospect of a little dance in the hall afterwards—Simpson, Prestwith's curate and his sister, Major Bagge, who had taken a house in Gretton parish (some of his young people were coming later), a Mr. Ralstone, who had come for some hunting and lodged in one of the farms on the Banbury estate.

Molly had by this time got used to Kitty's flirtatious ways, though she could never bring herself to like them. And yet could it be asserted that Kitty ever *said* anything that the most demure girl might not have said? It was not she, but her eyes, that said things for her—unauthorized things.

Harold Ralstone, who knew nothing of the politics of Gretton and Netley, could not bring himself to believe that Kitty was really going to get married, and he told her as much.

"I can't help what you believe," she said. "Thought is free in this country, is it not?"

"Then if I like to think there's still a ghost of a chance left for a fellow I can, I suppose?"

"You can; but you'd better not."

They were sitting out, of course: Kitty could not dance. The talk drifted to other things.

"I wish you hunted," Mr. Ralstone said.

"I wish I was rich enough to keep a horse."

"Oh, I could lend you a horse, an awfully quiet little hunter. It has carried my sister. Fourteen and a half hands."

"Oh, no, thank you. I didn't mean that I could ride."

"But you'll have to if you go out—somebody said you were going out to India."

"No; to—to Egypt." Kitty's heart gave a great throb. Was it really actually settled? She was really going to be

married to Bertie in three weeks or so. "Yes," she went on, "Mr. Vanlennert says I ought to learn to ride."

"Hooray! Then I'll give you some lessons. When shall we begin?"

Kitty's eyes fell upon him for an instant with that look that, as Cecil Banbury said, "makes a fellow jump out of his skin, almost." But she was thinking, not of him, but of Bertie.

"When will you begin?"

"Oh, I don't know," and she changed the subject. He told her something of the old farmhouse where he had put up. Then they talked of the house they were in, and of its delightful nooks and niches.

"You know there's a regular sort of crypt under some back stairs. You go along that passage. . . Shall I show you?"

"Yes, do," said Kitty.

They went along to a short flight of stone steps, at the bottom of which the arched vault of a disused staircase overshadowed them. There was more vaulting beyond, and this Mr. Ralstone called the crypt. As they were turning back two men's voices came to them very distinctly from behind a buttress, which, as a matter of fact, just hid the door of Cecil Banbury's smoking-room, and the door was open.

"By Gad! I think your cousin's a damned lucky chap. He's picked up one of the prettiest things in girls I've seen for a long time."

Ralstone cast a side-glance at his companion. (Even he had no doubt who was the person spoken of.) Kitty's mouth was demurely shut, but her eyes danced. (If Bertie could only hear that!)

"Well, yes." (One might fancy it was Bertie's voice. But *he* could never have spoken in that tone. "Well, yes." And this from a man who had proposed to her that very afternoon!) "Yes, her *face* is pretty enough. But she's not sound, you know. And how anybody can go in for a horse or a woman who's not sound I don't know. I wouldn't marry a lame girl for any money. The other thing . . ."

Kitty heard no more. Mr. Ralstone did not glance at her face this time.

CHAPTER LIX.

HE would soon be out of all this once more, Herbert Vanlennert reflected. It was in a big crush. Of course, the season was still a long way off. But the session had begun, and there were enough people to make a good show at Dorsetshire House, where was this crush after a big dinner, all in honour of the union of hearts between two once rival parties in the state. Sir Hardinge had gone to the dinner; Herbert only came afterwards. "Yes, by Jove, going to a new field of work. It wouldn't be so romantic as the inexpressible East." And for a moment Herbert's imagination took him into the narrow streets of Kabul on the day of a Mohammedan festival; he seemed almost to hear the wild cries and chanting. What swarms and swarms coming down the hill!

Then a friend spoke to him. "One would not have thought there were so many people in London. Shall you be here all the season, Mr. Vanlennert?"

"I? No, indeed, I sha'n't. I'm going off next month, I hope."

"How horrid of you to say 'I hope'! But I suppose you despise civilization, now you've had such a wonderful life out there."

"Ah! I'm not going out there again. I'm going to Egypt. Sir Everard Barclay's going to put me through, I hope. At first I shall be on the Police . . . No; I don't know how long it is since I've seen a London season."

"Oh, I'm so sorry you're going so soon! But Egypt's much nearer to London than Afghanistan. By the way, I've a nephew out there at present—he's on Sir Richard Grenfell's staff—I hope you'll see him."

The lady passed on. "Yes; I should have liked to stay for the season. all the same," Vanlennert thought. Mechanically his eye fell on a handsome young man talking to a pretty, light-haired girl. She wasn't remarkable, just the nice type of English maiden that he liked. But somehow here, where the air was alive with the glitter of diamonds and the wind of feathery fans, there was a touch of romance about it all. Of course, that girl was not a patch on Kitty. But Herbert felt for the hundredth time—without ever once acknowledging his

feelings to himself—that Kitty had been won too easily, and that it is not the prize only but the pursuit that men love. Here, where the air was full of that pursuit, that eternal chase and eternal flight, he felt as if he had been defrauded of something, and he started at the sight of a face which always recalled that of Silvia Tennant.

“Ah!” said Mrs. Forster. “It’s Mr. Vanlennert, isn’t it? How long it is since we’ve met!”

“Yes; but you’ve not changed a bit,” said Herbert, kindly.

“I don’t say that of you. You’ve much improved.”

“You’ve scored.”

“And you’re a great man now. . . .”

When they had talked a while longer Mrs. Forster went on:

“You’re staying with Sir Hardinge More he told me. I sat next him to-night at dinner. He told me your good news. I congratulate you with all my heart.”

“Thanks,” said Herbert, most heartily. “I don’t know whether you know her,” he went on.

“*Her!*” Mrs. Forster wreathed her face in smiles. “Oh, is there a ‘her’ as well? I’m so glad. I didn’t know that.”

“Oh, you meant about my going to Egypt. Well, that’s a great chance for me. Sir Everard says that people have no idea what a lot there is to do. I expect he’ll be able to get me into the . . .”

“Yes, yes. But as you’ve begun upon the more interesting subject to a woman of the—the inexpressible she, I hope you’ll tell me some more.”

“Well, I was wondering whether you knew her,” began Herbert, a little shyly this time.

“You are engaged to be married, then, Mr. Vanlennert? That’s the first point.”

“Yes; certainly.”

“And to?”

“Miss Maynard. I don’t know whether you know her. You must re . . .”

“No; I . . .” Mrs. Forster had begun. She tried her best to control her voice and her countenance. But suddenly she saw a light flash into his, Mr. Vanlennert’s, eyes; his lips parted in a ghastly smile; he grew pale.

“I am *most* glad,” she said, pressing his hand in a curious feverish way. “Ah! I see Frank wants to be off. When is it to be?” But she did not wait for the answer. Gertrude

was conscious that on this occasion her acting had been beneath contempt.

As Herbert pushed his way down the stairs and on to the hall door he passed Frank Forster and his wife, who seemed to be talking over something, and who could not help following him with their eyes.

"Oh, by Heaven! My *God!*" he said. He began with shaking fingers unbuttoning his great-coat about the neck and then buttoning it again. He did not know why he did so. No articulate thought was in his mind. Almost the first feeling he did become conscious of was immeasurable surprise that this open secret should have escaped him so long. Why, everything fitted in with it! He had received a dozen pieces of damning evidence, and yet never once thought of joining them together: a certain surprise, a certain scrutiny in Bertram's look, he recognised quite well now. (Bertram had behaved the worst of all, damn him! That's what you call a friend!) Kitty's own strange varieties of mood. Why, Percy Glenbyre had as good as told him every detail, only by chance he had left out Kitty's name; she was a *sort* of niece of Churton's. That he should have been *fooled* like this, he who had begun to think no small things of himself, with all the compliments that had been paid him of late. Mrs. Ayntree flattering him about his book: "What a wonderful book that is of yours, Mr. Vanlennert!" and then foisting her "poor Kitty" on to him. It was enough to make a corpse laugh.

What a triple, fourfold, hundredfold ass and fool he had been to drop into this thing! Kitty was . . .

What *had* she seemed to him?

Not herself, her present self, at all. Only the old Kitty, the beautiful soft child with beseeching eyes, that he remembered of five or six years ago. That's what she had always remained essentially. The actual Miss Maynard, the Miss Maynard with a shady past, was no relation to the Kitty of old days.

At this point the hansom began to slacken its pace, and there shot into Herbert Vanlennert's mind the most vivid recollection of the other hansom drive to Hanbury Road, Bayswater. Positively it seemed to him now as if there must have been two Kitty Maynards living in that flat, the dear child of old days and another being, compounded of Mary Beeston and Violet Fisher, a modern girl, a creature without principles or moral sense; clever certainly—he remembered now, even with

a certain soreness, how *that* one used to criticise his writing when she read his proofs, and even made him change some of his expressions. From an old friend who looked up to him, as Kitty used to look up, it was all very well; but from a new woman who despised mankind and thought them fair subjects for the vilest treachery and deceit, it was another matter. How he hated Mrs. Ayntree, Violet Fisher, and all that lot! Ah! think of Molly in comparison! And at Gretton this last time he had let Kitty, as it were, blot out Molly from his thoughts.

It would never *do* to let himself think of the new Kitty as in any way connected with the old, or else . . .

Oh, God! How beautiful she was! It was only now, when he thought of the present Kitty as a being apart, that is to say, a woman fully grown, that Vanlennert realised how beautiful she was, how soft and yet strong were her hands; and her cheek softer still, and her eyes—oh, damnation! To have to give all that up for ever! Once more “for ever,” as he had had to say so often to himself in the old Silvia days. Couldn’t he condone—not deprive himself of that last chance of happiness? No; damn it! He must, he would. All that was only disguised sensuality. It was so he used to feel about Bee Kirtle once upon a time. He had gained that great victory over himself; that had made a man of him; that was the beginning of all his worthy achievement in life.

The same thoughts arose again and again. They were with him in the train next day as he sped toward Burton Broadway.

Another voice said, “You’re thinking only of yourself: can’t you have a little pity? Kitty *does* love you; it can’t be humbug. Think only of that walk to and from Netley Church. Think of . . .” Scene after scene forced itself upon his memory.

No; damnation! That was just weakness. That’s how he used to feel—not so strongly, it’s true—about Beatrice Kirtle. One must act like a man. In any case, Kitty was impossible; she might not be as bad as he thought her sometimes: he hoped, he prayed, she was not, but she was impossible. It would be only a kindness to both to make the separation short, sharp, irrevocable. For all that, Herbert felt himself turning paler and paler as he registered this final decision. My God! They were dashing through Mallaby Station—in ten minutes more . . .

“You, Bertie! Oh, I am gl . . .” The words froze on Molly’s lips as she saw the expression of Herbert’s face. Kitty and

she were sitting alone in the drawing-room. The latter only uttered a cry and turned white as a sheet. She sprang up from the sofa on which she had been sitting. Molly, too, got up.

"I think you had better not stay, Molly," Herbert said. She looked in his face and said nothing. She saw his hand was trembling as he opened the door. A great anger rose in her heart against Kitty.

"Well, you seem to know well enough what I've come about," said Herbert, brutally, as soon as Molly had gone.

Kitty made no answer. She stood there white as a ghost, her blue eyes shining out as patches of clear ice show upon a snow-field.

"You thought you'd been very sharp, getting hold of somebody who'd been away all this time, and didn't know your history." Herbert was striding up and down the room as he spoke. He avoided looking at Kitty lest her pitiful face should move him. "No wonder you've seemed odd sometimes. Nobody but a woman could have carried on such a deceit."

Kitty was struggling to speak. But the words seemed as if they would not articulate themselves. At last she spoke huskily. "There was nothing to tell. I had done nothing."

"Oh, nonsense!" Bertie looked at her once, a look of contempt. It was the hardest thing that Kitty had ever had to bear in her life. But it stung her courage into life. She seemed to have to do with Herbert and Frank both at the same moment.

"What do you mean by nonsense?" she cried. "You mean I am telling a lie. You don't believe me. You think I am bad!"

There was a ring of sincerity in the tone which Herbert, furious as he was, could not but acknowledge. He felt a moment's compunction.

"No," he said; "I didn't *say* that."

"You didn't *say* that; then you think so."

It wouldn't do to be softened. "It *is* a lie," Herbert said, answering rather Kitty's earlier remark, "to say you did nothing. Why did you turn so white directly I came in?"

"Because, because . . ."

"Why have you never asked me what I have heard?" he cried, growing furious once more. ("It's too much impudence!" he thought.) "Because, because," he went on, with a sneer, "you know that you did go away with Crawford Tennant . . ."

"He took me away." Kitty hardly knew what she was saying. It was the expression of her former lover's face, not his words, that paralysed her thought.

"Took you away! Good God! What an excuse! It might be good enough if you were some poor girl in the street."

"Oh, you are cruel; you hate me! Go away. I don't want ever to see you any more," Kitty cried.

"Good God! You don't attempt to deny it! And you've kept me in the dark all this time. I suppose Bertram knew it, too."

"I was going to tell you, what there was to tell. He told me to . . ."

"After we were married, I suppose. You thought because I'd just come back . . ."

"Why did you ever come back? I never asked you to come back. You had left me all those years. And now I had begun to find something to do." ("What was it?" Kitty said to herself. "What was my life before?" She could not remember now.)

"If you had told me," Herbert said, as he strode about the room. "I might have got over it. I don't know. I might have married you."

"You would not. I would not marry you. I thought you were different. I loved you so much. I have kept all your letters. Oh! I thought—I thought you were so different. And now you are like all the others, mean, and base, and cruel. Oh, no! I would not marry you."

And as she said this Kitty Maynard seemed to be transformed. A measureless power of passion leapt into her eyes. As on that other occasion when all alone, half starved, half delirious, in great physical pain and in mental agony, she had made her way back to Norwich, it seemed to give her for the moment preternatural strength.

Herbert had gone without speaking to anyone. What could it mean? Molly asked herself. Alas! It was quite clear what it meant. Kitty—that wicked girl—and yet Molly could not deny that she was beginning to like her—had sent him away. She had changed her mind. Oh, it was Frank's fault! Why had fate brought him back a week too soon? Molly thought she knew enough of Frank to know that he would never seriously think of marrying a penniless girl like Miss Maynard.

"What is it?" she said, in a severe tone, to Kitty.

"I told you, I told you, I should never marry him," the other answered, in an apathetic manner.

"You've sent him away? How wicked of you! I saw you didn't care for Bertie as you ought."

"I send him away?" Kitty answered, with dazed eyes. "I not care for him? . . . No! I don't," she said; "he is cruel and wicked."

Molly was going to answer. But Kitty had gone deadly white: and she saw that without a word, without a sign, she had fainted.

"What is it? What has happened?" Molly said, frightened. "Oh, it can't be anything serious!"

Herbert went back to London. On the second day he received a letter from Molly. First she informed him that Kitty had gone home to Norwich. By a certain perversity of sex from which even Molly Vanlennert was not free, now that the engagement was broken off, Molly wished that it should be on again, though she had previously decided that Kitty was not the wife for her cousin. The truth is that Kitty had seemed changed during the last four-and-twenty hours of her stay at Gretton. She had cared to see no one but Molly, and had—as the latter wrote to Bertie—been so gentle and good, that Molly was sure she could not have meant to quarrel with Bertie, whatever the cause of the rupture might be.

It was awful to get this letter. Herbert saw, on looking back, that he had not been very fair, that he had given Kitty no opportunity of explaining. But he realised, or half realised, another thing which came to him as a shock—namely, that in this last interview, in this final rupture, he had for the first time fallen in love with the actual Kitty Maynard. This last discovery did not soften him: it had the contrary effect. He remembered how weak he was by nature about women. He was determined not to listen to those siren voices—of what? of love, of mere passion?—which cried to him to forgive and make it up. How Kitty's face and figure and the tones of her voice haunted him! Why, when he was with her, had he never felt what a beautiful and sweet thing a woman was—a woman who cared for you? The one thing in this sterile world. He had understood that great truth well enough in the old days when he was little more than a boy. Now that he had begun to respect himself as a man of action it had been hidden from

his eyes, and only learnt when it was too late. Hell and damnation! There was nothing more to be said. He had brought Mrs. Ayntree to book, and heard (as he supposed) the whole story. Of course it was damnable, infernal that a beast like Crawford Tennant should have done such a thing. But if the thing had been done, and Cæsar's wife was so very, very far from being above suspicion—

"She was such a child," Mrs. Ayntree had pleaded, and "she was never properly looked after."

"Oh, I daresay; I'm sorry enough for her," Herbert said to himself. "But, damn it all! I'm not going to drag my name in the mud again." The pang—every now and then it would come back to him with an awful shock—of his own illegitimacy made him more determined, more cruel perhaps. It was too much to expect him in his turn to marry a girl who . . .

"By God! I wouldn't do it to save my life," Herbert swore. "But to save her life—think of her," said another voice. "I do. It's damnable. I'd do anything I could. But this is impossible. And after all she took me in." The only thing to be done was to throw himself energetically, feverishly, into his preparations for departure.

CHAPTER LX.

"A YOUNG lady is coming to-night whom you'll have heard something of—Miss Maynard," said Dr. James Abernethy in his boldest voice.

Mrs. Abernethy cast down her eyes. At heart she, too, was now on the side of Kitty Maynard. She had begun by refusing to know her; that, however, was years ago. But whether it was right to thrust her upon her guests, Rose Pringle and her husband, was another matter. She preferred to remain neutral.

Rose's tone relieved her. "Ah, yes, Miss Maynard," Mrs. Pringle said. . . . "Is she as beautiful as she used to be?" she added presently.

"Quite," said Dr. Abernethy, heartily. "And what's more, she's becoming a celebrity—I mean to say," he went on hurriedly, feeling the awkwardness of that expression as applied

to Kitty—"I mean to say she'll be a great painter, they say, some of these days, like her father."

Kitty had in truth exhibited two pictures the previous spring, and had some very good notices, and these local sentiment had exaggerated into positive fame. For whatever Miss Maynard's faults may have been in the past—all the more in truth because of the talk to which she had given birth—Kitty was something of a heroine in Norwich now. There were, of course, two parties on the subject. But this evening Rose Pringle only heard what the friendly party said of Kitty: how good she was to her little brothers and sisters, for one thing; for the other, how much Norwich thought of her talents. Mrs. Gambier, an old rich widow, who was Kitty's chief patron, was going to lend her house for a little exhibition of Miss Maynard's work. She had likewise sat to her for her portrait—one of Kitty's first efforts in that line.

"Why shouldn't you have yeself painted, Rose, and send it out to yerr father in Bombay?" said Doctor Abernethy, growing more Scottish in the exuberance of his good nature. Both he and Mrs. Abernethy knew, if they chose to remember it, that they had been mainly responsible for letting out the flood of gossip about Kitty Maynard long years ago.

"I hope it's really true that she's good now," said the religious Rose Pringle to herself, as Kitty and Lily came into the room. It was no party. The Abernethys were homely people, but friendly, and liked to ask in one or two of their neighbours whenever opportunity offered. Their roomy house in Thorpe Road, Thorpe Hamlet, was built rather in the bungalow style, as an allusion to Dr. James's elder and more distinguished brother, the Supreme Court judge. One young man was asked, a curate from St. Saviour's of the New Evangelical School, that is, with a dash of the muscular Christian superimposed upon a dislike of sacerdotalism; he was believed to be devoted to Lily Maynard. Perhaps it was partly the fact that she was chaperoning this demure pretty sister of twenty that made Kitty appear to have grown so immensely in age. She was perfectly self-possessed. At the first grasp of her muscular hand Rose Pringle, though she herself was twenty-eight, felt that they met as equals in age. Kitty bore, too, a good part in the conversation; for she had, after all, seen more of the world, and knew more what was talked about in the capital, than her country neighbours, and she was, in addition, a great reader; she

was rich enough now to buy herself books, and she had a studio where she could keep and read them without remonstrance.

The Reverend James Pringle, once the "little Padre," now the well-to-do Vicar of a midland town, was a man who thirsted for information.

"But now will you tell me," Rose heard him saying to Kitty, "what it is they mean by the term Newland School?"

"Newlyn School. It's a place in Cornwall that painters go to, and they all try to paint more or less alike—to keep up their originality," she added, with a slight laugh. "They're coming very much to the fore."

"I can see you don't care for them much."

"Oh, yes, I do," said Kitty, earnestly. "Only . . . It seems so odd you know; they live down in a beautiful country on the sea-coast, where all sorts of things must happen. And they paint people having tea in cottages, or penny-readings, or sales by auction, or . . ."

"But why do they do that? That seems very silly," put in Rose, who could never keep very long away from her husband.

"No; it's not silly. It's part of their plan. I should do the same . . ."

"You would?" said Mr. Pringle, astonished. "Why, I thought you were laughing at it just now."

"Not if I were a man!" Kitty's eyes dilated with emotion. "I should try and paint pictures like my father."

"Ah!" said Mr. Pringle.

"You don't know my father's pictures," said Kitty, keenly.

"I can't recall them at this moment."

"How odd! Then of course you couldn't understand what I mean. There was something extraordinarily grand about his work—grand and lonely. The best of them all is a ploughman on the top of a hill against the sky. It would be impossible to give you any idea . . ."

"I do remember to have seen the picture—I mean a copy of it—in an illustrated paper," Mr. Pringle put in, warmly. Kitty came to a sudden pause and gave a slight laugh.

"But do go on," said Rose.

"Well, I was going to say that no words, nor any illustrated paper either, could give you any idea of the grandeur of the workmanship and the simplicity at the same time. It was so different—I could explain if we were looking at it—so different from the sort of Christmas-card landscapes that are popular at

the Academy. The sentiment isn't—isn't outside the picture itself, in the mind of the person looking at it, as it is in those sunsets, yellow cornfields, and mills, and things you see there." Kitty's eyes grew moist with enthusiasm. Now only when it was too late did she appreciate the genius of the man who had given her birth.

"It's more original, you mean?" said Mr. Pringle.

"Yes," said Kitty, in despair—"more original, if you like. It forces itself on you somehow. . . . 'The Ploughman's Following' is at Birmingham now," the speaker went on, presently; "you can see it there in the Gallery. I make a pilgrimage there from time to time to see it. *That's* not like village tea-parties and penny-readings."

"Let's make one while we are here," said Rose.

"But why shouldn't you paint in the same style?" said James.

"Oh, a woman. You can't. Father used to go away by himself for weeks, sometimes inland, but generally on the sea-coast. Even if he wasn't painting, he was taking it all in, absorbing it and alone. One must be alone. . . . I don't like change," she went on, in a lighter tone; "I want always to stay down in the same corner and paint commonplace things."

"You must have been very fond of your father," Rose said. This was a fortnight after their first meeting. Rose was having her portrait done, and to-day, what did not very often happen, was sitting alone.

"No, I wasn't," said Kitty. "That's the worst part of it. I didn't care anything about art then and didn't understand it the least. None of us did: that's the worst part of it. Fancy being a great artist—because he really was great; it was not *only* that he had grandiose ideas, but his technique was so good. I showed you that when we went to look at 'The Ploughman's Following;' the drawing's so perfectly true—and with a large family and yet utterly alone."

"But if he had all of you, why was he so much alone?" said the direct-minded Rose.

"Oh, you don't understand. . . . You've turned your head a little bit too much, dear; thank you. . . . It's awful, really, to be a great artist." Kitty spoke with pauses as she plied her brush. (Rose smiled.) "Yes, it is really worse than a musician or an author now-a-days. You're cut off more from your fellow-men."

"Why?"

"Because, because," the painter went on, seeking for words to clothe the thoughts which had come to her in her hours of silent meditation. "I mean unless you paint down to your public and give them pictures like Hartmann's, for instance."

"But are his bad? I thought they had been praised so much. Of course I don't understand much about pictures. But I saw that large picture this year, 'May Morning,' and I liked it so much."

"Yes, everybody likes them. The newspapers all call them idyllic because they understand what they're meant to tell. It's all plain sailing with pictures of that kind. But with father's pictures it wasn't plain sailing. Only I expect—no, I am sure, that if you had to live with the two pictures you'd find out the difference. They are not like a simple story: they came out of himself: I feel that. But *I* could not tell all he meant and thought about them. . . . Perhaps *he* couldn't even. . . . That's what I call being alone."

Rose made an uncertain sound of doubtful assent.

"I know I can't explain what I mean, what I feel about it. . . . His pictures are what you might feel if you were looking at the very scene . . . and yet . . . looking through it and into it at the same time. The other . . . of course Hartmann never really saw girls going out maying. It's only his idea of what they might have looked like. I daresay the actual landscape may be taken from nature. But the girls weren't in it."

"I think I understand the difference," Rose said, with Scottish conscientiousness. There came a pause as Miss Maynard painted on. Then the sitter spoke again.

"But you know the guide-book at Birmingham said that it was a reminiscence of his childhood."

"Oh, but he had seen it since. . . . I didn't mean that the feeling for a thing might not come from a long time back. . . . That's different. . . . He saw the thing . . . but . . . the feeling helped him to see right through it."

"And you don't think Mr. Hartmann does that?"

"Oh, no!" Another pause.

"Your father was very much appreciated and admired in his life, wasn't he?"

"Yes; I suppose so. I said I didn't understand then. He's beginning to be forgotten now."

"Oh, I don't think so. Look at what that Catalogue said.

. . . How was it you changed and came to care about art?" Rose asked without reflection. But before the other could reply she hurried on: "When you begin to be talked about they will remember him better again."

Kitty laughed scornfully. "A woman! Women never do anything in art."

Rose said such polite things as the occasion seemed to require. Then fell another silence, till Mrs. Pringle asked—

"You are quite happy in your life?"

Kitty's mouth fell and hardened. "Happy? Well, that's a good deal for anybody to say in this world, isn't it?"

"Oh, no: I don't think so."

"I am content, at any rate."

Another pause. Rose sighed. "Oh, Kitty," she said, at last (they had become close friends by this time), "I should like you to be so much more than that—such a beautiful woman as you are, too. Haven't you . . . Isn't there anyone you care for?"

Kitty's hand began to tremble. . . . A dab of paint had gone on the hair which was meant for the forehead.

"I hate the idea of all that," she said, without raising her eyes from her work. And presently she added, "Of course I have; you know . . ."

"Yes, yes," said Rose, hastily.

"*That* one? No; I always hated him. That's the thing I hate most about Norwich—a place on the Ipswich Road—where he came down and found me and wanted me to marry . . ." she broke off with a shudder. Then she flushed angrily. "I thought you knew more about it than that," she said.

"No, I don't; I knew that . . . I've never liked to say how much I feel . . . I knew you were not to blame."

"I sha'n't talk about it; I mean never to again." Kitty tried to go on with her painting. But the worst of all things had come upon her, the remembrance of that past—of only eighteen months ago. All her determination to lead an artist's life, all her pleasure in her work crumbled away as if by magic. "We can stop for a minute," she said, at last. And she went to an ottoman and sat down.

Rose rushed to her. "Oh, Kitty, how pale you are! You stand up too much. . . . It was my fault. I didn't mean to talk about those things." Kitty was not only white but she was trembling, all at once grown weak as a child after her superhuman efforts to talk indifferently. Suddenly with a gulp she broke down in passionate weeping.

Rose was overcome with horror of herself. "Dear, dearest Kitty! How could I do it!" She took the other in her arms and murmured inarticulate words of comfort. "It's all past so long since. Nobody ever thinks of it now," and so forth.

"You don't understand," Kitty said, struggling for her voice. "It's not that."

Rose waited for a further explanation, but none came. But she thought she was safe in hazarding a conjecture. "There is somebody you—love?"

"I did," she said. "I thought you knew—I was engaged to him, and . . . and he found out . . ."

"Oh, how dreadful! But hadn't you told him?"

"I'd tried to tell him. He wouldn't understand. He was cruel, wicked," Kitty went on, her anger rising again. "He went away; he wouldn't hear anything I said. He said the most horrible things to me, that I will never forgive, never."

"He must have been a horrid man; he couldn't really have loved you."

"No; he wasn't bad. So good, you would have said. But it doesn't matter; I shall never see him again, so what does it matter? I don't think I should have been happy married. I want to paint."

"Oh, Kitty!"

"Yes, I do. It's not only pretence. I know it generally is when girls pretend they want to devote themselves to painting or music—all humbug generally, I know."

"You wouldn't be happy if . . ."

"I should. And it isn't only being happy. I feel I *ought* to paint. And I shall be able to some day."

"You can now, beautifully."

Kitty made no reply, feeling the inadequacy of the compliment.

"But," said Rose, "you might paint still if you were married."

"Oh, that's all over."

"Where is he now?"

"In Egypt, I believe. Don't let's talk of it any more. Vanlennert he was called."

"Vanlennert—not Herbert Vanlennert?"

"Yes. You know him? Oh, out there, I suppose."

"Oh, yes. A long time ago, six years—more. I thought him so nice then. He always seemed to me so specially kind-hearted."

"Oh, don't, don't!" Kitty cried.

"You love him still, then?" said Rose, in her curious, conscientious way.

"I don't want to love him."

"Don't want to? Oh, don't say that! I'm sure you might. Has no one ever explained?"

"No. It would be no use. I couldn't explain what I feel—to you. I used to think men were so nice. The first man I ever loved the least little bit: no, not the first; he—Bertie was the first . . ."

"He was the first, and you've always loved him, then? How could you let him go? It's just dreadful."

"I don't think it is so dreadful. Men—well—I can't say anything to you about them."

"But you can't think that all men are the same. And it isn't as if you've found a bad man in Mr. Vanlennert, because he isn't. Lady More, she was the best woman I ever knew, and she was the kindest to me, she was very fond of Mr. Vanlennert, too; indeed . . ." Rose stopped, feeling a little self-conscious.

Kitty felt much older than her companion. She had recovered all her self-possession now, and she was ashamed of her break-down of ten minutes ago. She smiled superiorly, even a little bitterly. "That's why you like him," she said. And then she went on: "I couldn't explain to you—because, because you're different. I want to feel free to do my own work."

But perhaps Rose Pringle was not very deeply impressed by these arguments, though she said no more at the time.

Only, three or four days later—The Pringles were going to leave in two days; Rose had no doubt talked certain matters over with her husband in the mean time—she said, as she kissed Kitty—

"We've settled that we're going to Cairo next winter."

Whereat Kitty blushed vividly and then turned pale. "You're going to Egypt?" she cried, with a moment's look of wild hope in her eyes. "No; it's no use," she added.

"I think it would be of use if you wish it."

"I don't know . . . if I wish it or not," Kitty said, wringing her hands.

"If you love him . . ." Rose held out her hands. Kitty seized them.

"I did; oh, so much! And now . . . I shall be miserable anyway."

Rose could not help laughing a little.

Kitty went on, holding her by both hands,—she had suddenly become almost like a child.

“I feel sometimes so lonely here. And when I am getting on well with my painting it suddenly comes over me—all I’ve lost: everything in life that other women get. If he’d been what I thought him then. But I’ve helped myself out of it. I couldn’t forgive him now.”

“Oh, Kitty! We can forgive anything to those we love. (Mrs. Pringle knew that her James was not quite the ideal James of pre-matrimonial days.)

Kitty’s face softened. “I did,” she said, musingly. “But perhaps now I shouldn’t.”

Howbeit, from that time forward she did not avoid the subject of Herbert Vanlennert, and Rose learned all their history. She soothed Kitty’s soul by blaming her sharply. She knew that she followed a double impulse in trying to bring them together again. But on the last day of the Pringles’ stay—the portrait was just finished—

“I should have to give up my art,” Kitty said. “Oh, I don’t mean to wish it. . . . It’s not kind of you to make me hope again. Don’t go to Egypt. I’d rather you wouldn’t. I’ve settled to work. I don’t want to begin it all over again.”

“But you have no right to think of yourself,” Rose said, severely. “If you had been frank at first . . .”

CHAPTER LXI.

A CONJURER was crouched in one corner of the verandah. He wore a full white turban and a light burnoose; his feet were bare. He tapped his cheek with one finger, and there came from it a sound of chinking money. It swelled as though he had the mumps, and then he began to draw therefrom an endless number of copper *feloos*, which clinked and chinked as he threw them down upon his carpet.

The English visitors at Shepherd’s were crowded round him. “I think it most wonderful, don’t you, Mr. Vanlennert?” said one lady. “Now, is it as wonderful as what the Indian jugglers do, Colonel Bracegirdle? Will he do the mango trick, do you suppose, or anything like that?”

"Look, that's smart," said a boy. "Did you see? He broke an egg and a chicken came out."

"I shall just stay till he eats fire," Vanlennert said. "I've seen that a hundred times, and I always like seeing it done." He spoke a word or two of Arabic to the conjurer, who grinned and showed all his white teeth.

Other talk suitable to the place surged round them. "Yes; we went this morning. Aren't they wonderful? I bought some delightful little lamps. Of course my husband says you can get them just as good and much cheaper in England." "Well, if you can? You men are so mighty prosaic, colonel." "Oh, I've no objection to spending money if Maisy likes it, none whatever. I only say I've seen the same things in London, that's all, at a less price." "I say, we're missing this. That gentleman asked him to do the fire-eating trick, I believe, and now he's going to do it."

And all this time there passed in front of the folk in the verandah an endless procession of figures, a sort of masque symbolising the life of Cairo. Swarthy one-eyed calenders; donkey-boys much marked with the small-pox, with flat noses and preternaturally wide, white-toothed mouths; men of much the same appearance as Jews in England, frock-coated, wearing red fezes; and now there ran by two syces in baggy white drawers and brilliant tight-fitting jackets, shot with gold. They ran by at a quick and steady trot, and they had wands in their hands. Close upon their heels followed an English landau, and within were two ladies beautifully dressed. They were Lady Barclay and her sister. They waved their hands to Herbert Vanlennert, who had left the conjurer and was now seated with a book at the opposite corner of the verandah. He took off his hat. As he was still following them with his eyes a red-haired lady came out of the hotel with her husband, a short, dark man, in a grey suit, with a pith helmet and puggaree. The lady walked across to where Herbert was sitting and held out her hand.

"You don't remember me, Mr. Vanlennert?"

"Miss Abernethy—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Pringle: of course I do." And he shook hands very warmly. "I heard of your marriage, but didn't know where to write and congratulate you."

"Here's my husband. You remember him."

Then they fell to talking of old times in Bombay and of the Mores, of Lady More especially.

Bertie looked very brown and handsome ; so that Rose Pringle felt more than ever determined to carry out her benevolent scheme. She had come over, full of this plan, to ask him to lunch at their hotel near the pyramids.

"Ah, you're at the Mena Hotel. It was opened the year I came out."

The day following Herbert found himself seated by Rose in the grounds of her hotel. Some people were playing lawn tennis near them, and above the pyramids slept in the sunshine.

"I wanted," Rose said, suddenly, and then with hesitation, "to speak to you about . . . something . . . special."

Herbert gave a start and then looked at her searchingly. Her manner seemed to suggest—something. But how could she know? He was an ass—always going back to that; the door was shut.

Mrs. Pringle became more and more embarrassed. "I wanted . . . You must not be angry with me." She looked up at him in her old shy way, which always had a suggestion of humour in it. It had, too, a certain suggestion of Lady More, and that would have been sufficient to disarm Herbert at once.

"I sha'n't be that," he said. "But I don't understand."

"I used," Rose went on without waiting—"I've lately—last summer—got to know a very good and beautiful girl, Miss Maynard."

"Oh," said Herbert, and he stiffened visibly.

"My uncle, Doctor Abernethy, lives at Norwich, and he has known them all, certainly, ever since . . . since . . ."

"I fancy I know what you mean," said Herbert, coldly.

"And now this year I heard for the first time that . . . that you had been engaged to Kitty" (Herbert winced at the Christian name, but he said nothing), "and broken it off."

"That's quite true," he said, drawing in his breath.

"Oh, Mr. Vanlennert! I've heard the whole story—Kitty told me everything."

"She took you more into her confidence than she did me."

"And indeed, indeed," Rose went on, paying no attention to the sneer, "it is not so bad as you think."

"I really don't know that I ever particularised exactly how bad I thought it was. It is not denied, I suppose, that that fellow took her to a hotel and stayed there with her?"

"No; she escaped: she got out."

"Really? How soon was that? But I heard that, too."

The next morning, wasn't it? (Rose blushed vividly.) "Good God! We can't discuss a thing like that. That she only stayed half the night instead . . ."

"Hush, Mr. Vanlennert! Think what a child she was."

"Good Heaven, as if I don't know that! It's damnable. That man deserved to be flayed alive. But after all . . . the thing's done. . . . Perhaps," he went on, "if she'd told me. I don't know . . ."

"Ah! I'm sorry she didn't. But men are so hard. And besides . . ."

"Besides what?"

"I—I was going to say . . . that . . . when you think what so many men—I don't mean you . . ."

"Oh, that's nothing to do with it. That's the greatest nonsense that people talk now-a-days." ("Besides," Herbert continued to himself, "that has nothing to do with me." For he was not a little proud of the chastity of his life now.) "It's not that only," he said, out loud. "It's the deceit."

"What deceit? I don't think Kitty was *obliged* to tell you."

"Oh, don't you? Then I do." He made as if to get up.

Rose Pringle wrung her hands. Was her mission going to fail after all? "Nothing which was not true . . . Don't go yet, Mr. Vanlennert, please. . . . Besides," she went on, after a moment's pause, "women are not so brave as men. You frighten us into deceit sometimes. You are so proud and self-righteous. Oh, if you would only try and forgive!"

And there was something so gentle and beseeching in Rose's accent that tears involuntarily started into Herbert's eyes. To avoid raising his eyes he drilled holes in the gravel with his stick. Yet he was inwardly persuaded that it was impossible. This discussion was only giving pain to no good. One must accept the conventions of the world. Howbeit the more he drilled the more vividly did the image of Kitty Maynard shape itself before him. He had never mentioned her name to himself for nearly two years. And to hear her image evoked again under the name of Kitty—the one thing which it had seemed to him was to make the latter part of his life atone for the disillusion of the earlier part. Herbert was still only thirty-four. But he chose to think of himself as a middle-aged man now, to whom all the luck, the easy natural good fortune which comes to other men in wife and children and prosperity, had been denied. But if Kitty had only been—what

he thought her. Now her beauty rose up before him. Nay, if she had not been so much what he thought as what he beheld on that last morning when for the first time he knew her as a complete woman. That, without the fatal blot.

At last he said a thing which—if he had recognised—was like a surrender of the citadel. "How is it she's not married yet?" he asked, gruffly.

"Oh, can you ask?"

"I don't know. After all, it was quite as much she who gave me up as I her."

"Oh, that's nothing."

Herbert was half turned away, and it must be owned, winking vigorously at the point of his cane. At last he looked at Rose. "You're an awfully good soul," he said.

"Oh, no, when I think what a *terrible* mistake you are making. That you may ruin two lives that might be so happy."

"Oh, I'm too old to go in for sentiment," Herbert said, brusquely. If Rose had not been so serious at that moment she must surely have smiled at this, after she had just looked her companion full in the face. "You mean very well, I know. But don't you see yourself that it's impossible."

"No; indeed, I don't. Why?"

"It is. There are certain social conventions that must be obeyed. How could one ever marry a wife who was liable any day to meet people who knew—the man himself, perhaps?"

"Oh, I think that's very cowardly, Mr. Vanlennert. What is right and what is wrong does not depend upon public opinion and what people think happened."

"Perhaps I am a coward, then. I can't help it, that's all I can say. Everybody else would think the same." And he got up.

"If it was only you who suffered!" And Rose sighed as she too stood up.

"But . . . but—she's all right, isn't she? I saw some notices of her pictures . . ."

"She loves you, Mr. Vanlennert."

And with this last shaft Rose brought the interview to an end.

"Oh," said Rose, to her husband, "I hope he'll begin upon it again to me. If he does I shall be sure that he will come round."

"Yes. You think he will? If I could be so sure it's quite right that he should," Mr. Pringle said, doubtfully.

"James," exclaimed his wife, reproachfully, "think of spoiling two lives—which might be so beautiful! Besides, how are we to be forgiven if we don't forgive?"

"Yes, yes." Her husband spoke just a shade testily; for a tendency in Rose to idealise Herbert Vanlennert had not escaped him, though *she* was quite unconscious of it. "But it isn't a question of forgiveness. And I can't help feeling there's a great deal in the popular judgment upon those questions, that if a woman's reputation is even breathed on it's tarnished."

"What! forever? All her life spoilt!" Rose had this reply on the tip of her tongue. But she was a nice wife, who never argued with her lord and spiritual pastor, content if he left her free to follow the dictates of her conscience.

Three months later Edward Bertram entered his chambers. He had just been seeing the departure of two dear friends by the night mail to Marseilles—Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Vanlennert.

Everything was as it had always been. His books—there was actually one upon the table with a paper-cutter to keep the place. There was his desk, too, with its pigeon-holes. With a desperate attempt he went to the drawer which was consecrated to the *magnum opus*. This was the occupation which had eclipsed his life; surely, it would come now to the rescue. He took out some of the manuscript pages; his hand trembled as he handled them. He stared and tried to read, and found he could not comprehend one word. Then he was suddenly moved to look in his little passage, where a great wooden case—the only strange thing in the chambers—almost filled up all the room between the pantry door and the end of the wall. He found himself staring at the case, unable to move.

It was the last relic of Kitty Maynard. It contained, as Bertram knew, *her magnum opus*, a landscape on which she had worked off and on all that summer at Norwich, and signed by the letters she would never use again, K.M., ingeniously interlaced. He was to arrange for its exhibition next spring. Kitty had been inclined to abandon the whole matter; but in this he had insisted.

No more runs down to Norwich on spring mornings when the apple-trees flashed by the train, nor sittings in the studio, smoking his pipe, on heavy summer afternoons, when the thrushes in the garden condescended now and then to sing

one clear bar ; or, again, in the golden shadows of autumn. All, all gone—and for ever !

He went back into his room. Once more he tried to concentrate his mind upon a book, but in vain.

He filled his pipe and lit it, turned to the fire, then—

“ ‘ Non, si male nunc, et olim
Sic erit, ’ ”

he murmured to himself, staring at the glowing coals. And this time he thought with more complaisance, more affection, of *Will and Experience*, the title he had at last fixed on for the Great Work.

CHAPTER LXII.

HERBERT VANLENNERT and Kitty were seated side by side in the verandah which ran before their rooms. It was not like the crowded verandah of Shepherd's. It was a long shaded gallery some six feet above the ground, and looking upon a garden which was all alive with orange blossom and orange fruit and more delicate lemon. In one corner a banana spread huge green leaves over the other shrubs : crimson and purple bougainvillea made the whole scene look tropical and rich. It was the laziest hour of the day, after breakfast (*déjeuner*), when the hardest part of the day's work was over for Herbert. He was now an Under-Secretary. A mail had just come in.

Kitty had a thick letter from Bertram.

“ Is he sending you some proofs of his *magnum opus* ? ” said her husband, glancing sideways from his own official letters. For there was more than one strip of paper in the packet.

But Kitty was reading too eagerly to answer, and with flushed cheeks. At last with kindling eyes she handed the strip to her husband. It contained a notice of her Norfolk landscape. “ Apple-Trees and a Barn ” was what she had called the picture. There was another strip to read, and another. They read them together.

“ Well, I say, that's splendid,” Herbert said. “ I always thought you were a genius, now I'm sure of it.”

“ Oh, Bertie ! ‘ Always thought ; ’ you always thought I was a fool.”

"Kitty!"

"Or at any rate a child who couldn't understand anything."

"I believe I did think something like that," Herbert said, with his frank smile, which was always especially winning, "and . . ."

"So long as you don't think so now," said Kitty, her hands in his, looking up into her husband's face.

"You darling!"

Suddenly Kitty disengaged herself. "Oh, Bertie!" she said, "I am afraid. Women are so vain. I don't want to care for anybody's praise but yours."

"Dear sweet! I like praise, I know that; and I don't see why you shouldn't."

"Ah, but you're not an artist. You don't know what that is like."

"No—but I know what it is like—being in love; and I've a notion that compared with that all the other feelings melt to air, as . . ."

"As doubting thoughts and rash embraced despair; yes, they do," said Kitty; and then more softly she added, her head against her husband's shoulder—

" 'Oh, Love,
In measure rain thy joy, scant this excess,
I feel too much thy blessing.' "

"What does old Bertram say?" said Herbert, after a little while.

"I—I haven't read his letter yet," answered Kitty, taking up the sheet again.

THE END.

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